COUNTER ARCHIVES: UNFOLDING HIDDEN STORIES

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ABSTRACT

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We select what we value as history creating collective memory that can obfuscate or devalue other threads in the story intentionally or unintentionally. Through collections of material culture, curated and described by archivists, we receive information that constructs our collective memory of self. These cultural artifacts reflect and reconstruct the past. Material artifacts in the archives depend largely on the story that is told about their provenance to provide meaning. This paper takes photographic collections in archives as examples of material culture to demonstrate how archival presentation affects the stories of collections items, and examines modalities and subverted stories in archival collections. Often acting as boundary objects that create, subvert, or erase cultural memory, archival collections are subject to interpretation and in turn affect our collective memory. Text-based documents, manuscripts, were traditionally considered the core medium through which knowledge is transmitted in archives. The evolution of photography as a mode of recording the human experience impacted the archival approach and photographs soon became part of the historical record.

Archivists are trained to treat collections objectively, taking cues for description from the context of the source, and to minimally interpret these objects. Instead, archivists largely leave interpretation to the researcher who visits the archives specifically for that purpose. However, as other scholars of archives have addressed elsewhere, archives are far from neutral. Addressing the gaps this supposed neutrality leaves, I take an ethnographic approach to further interpret and pull from the hidden stories within the collections by examining three archival collections processed over the past ten years. Applying an ethnographic lens to "read" the photos, multiple narratives become evident. Emphasized here is the impact of archival records on what we remember about ourselves as a society, because we are as much what we forget as we are what we remember.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

TABLE OF FIGURES vi

INTRODUCTION 1

Archival Practices and Storytelling 2

IN THE ARCHIVES 8

Storytelling and collective memory 10

Representation in the Archives 17

Complications of Photographs 21

METHODS 30

Figures 39

HIDDEN STORIES IN THE ARCHIVES 42

The Chumash 46

The Unnamed 51

Black History 53

DISCUSSION 55

Hidden Stories 55

CONCLUSIONS 61

REFERENCES 63

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Digital record of the Gaydon Moore Brundridge Scrapbook. 39

Figure 2 Photograph of an unidentified man from the Gorraiz Collection....................... 40

Figure 3 Photograph of Sister's Inn located in San Luis Obispo, circa 1955 41

Figure 4 Screenshot of Library of Congress Subject Headings Authority file 41

INTRODUCTION

> *the archives are not just dead people talking, somehow, they become real people – some are ugly and some are truly enlightening. The pieces of paper and material objects hold a sense of time, place and purpose*
>
> *~Anonymous (Russell, 2018)*

Archival collections are selective resources. Archivists, curators, and librarians are trained in informational appraisal and selection of cultural materials to acquire and present to the public as objects of cultural heritage. Photographic collections in archives, a form of visual storytelling, are described by archivists with the intent of applying an objective lens based on the context in which they are collected. Archivists are trained to treat collections objectively, taking cues for description from the context of the source, and to minimally interpret the objects they collect and describe.

Archivists largely leave interpretation to the researcher who visits the archives specifically for that purpose while themselves using context within the collection to describe the objects in the aggregate. But, similar to anthropology's observational method, the field of archival science can only ever be partially objective. Archivists have assumed photographic evidence of facts, when they should and can take a more nuanced perspective towards the materials. Taking cues from the photographs, archivists may conduct further research on collections. Along with their goal of seeking to describe the materials and only to the extent needed for discovery in the catalog to create reference for informational access, archivists can build a 'thicker' perspective on the conditions that make archives possible, and the creativity to which they can be put. It has been the practice in archives to work under the presumption of neutrality, and while there is scholarship on refuting the neutrality of the archivist and highlighting the ways in which our internal biases and positionality affect the power and impact of archival collections on social and historical narratives, this thesis is meant to offer insight into the ways in which archival practices can shift towards a lens that enhances description and understands archives as storytelling, a cultural process by which collective memory is shared. In this thesis I describe standard archival practices and assumptions, and provide case studies that may help archivists and their users create a richer perspective on archival practice.

Archival Practices and Storytelling

There is an existing discourse in the archives field around what archivists refer to as “hidden collections”. These are defined by the Society of American Archivists as “an archival resource that is inaccessible and undiscoverable due to the unavailability or insufficiency of description” (SAA, n.d.) This definition describes collections that remain unprocessed or minimally described leaving them largely indiscoverable by researchers. This is an ongoing concern in archives given the limited staff and budgetary resources many archives work within to process collections. What is being explored here is archives as cultural objects that area interdependent on the stories we tell and correspondingly create the stories that we tell, and the ways in which objects stimulate or provide access to stories (Woodward, 2009).

Collections can often offer much more in terms of history, context, representation, and depth of story when revisited after processing, not only by researchers seeking a specific aspect of the collection, but by archivists who are responsible for preserving the stories held in the artifacts. This paper seeks to explore storytelling in the archives as an attestation to the human experience via the artifacts, documents, and other tangible evidence we collect, and the collective cultural memory these stories create or obfuscate, by addressing the hidden stories whether the collections have been processed or remain hidden. Revisiting three previously processed archival collections and seeking the stories behind their creation, curation, and description it becomes evident that there is much more to uncover, the telling of which has been limited by the constraints of archival practice and by the limits of the format of a finding aid.

Archives are storytelling - a cultural process by which collective memory is shared, and can be viewed through an anthropological lens to reveal the workings of cultural identity. Who tells a story, what aspects of a story are told, and what stories are saved and retold, create a framework for collective memory through which we “remember” ourselves. The channels of oral traditions, storytelling, folklore, literature, song, and place are elements of collective memory. There is an element of time delay in traditional oral storytelling practices, a space of months and sometimes years in which the story is passed from one generation to the next and a time delay under with the storyteller matures and the story becomes seasoned and ready for telling (Ong, 2002). Archival collections, similarly, experience a time delay between their creation as active records, their transition to an archival record, and ultimately to an archival collection accessible to the public. During this period, the collection ages as it becomes historical material, and meanwhile archivists are preparing the story to be shared with the public.

Archives have a process and an order, based on several hundred years of professional practice that has evolved into the practice as we know it today, but ultimately archives are a storytelling device that builds our collective memory, a type of mytho-historical and bio-mythographic observation. Observations that represent the human experience as an institution and a culture, creating a collective memory of self.

It is the stories contained in archival artifacts that give meaning to collections, and that build a collective memory of who we are as a society. The absence of stories creates an absence in our collective memory, a type of designed amnesia based on the choices of decision makers, such as archivists and cataloguers, in the archives. Photographs as expressive material culture within the archives can be described in terms of content, but should also “be the object of a reading that one may call sociological” (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2004, p. 605) to reveal the ways that we collectively select what we display and value as history creating collective memory that can obfuscate or devalue other threads in the story intentionally or unintentionally. The impact of archival records on what we remember about ourselves as a society is emphasized here because we are as much what we forget as we are what we remember, and material culture plays a significant role in how we remember ourselves. Photographs are always subject to the photographer’s focus, and archival artifacts are similarly subject to the archivists focus, and archival photographs can act as boundary objects and reflect multiple stories.

Archivists, trained in information science to appraise objects for informational value, play a much larger role in our collective memory than perhaps has yet been appreciated. Archivists are trained to ‘read’ objects and pare them down to descriptive terms using existing taxonomies. This is a reductive process meant to provide access via existing subject authority controls such as subject headings and brief descriptions, and archivists are expected to leave the interpretation to researchers. This isn’t always possible, and further, scholars have in recent years begun to identify and write about the inherent bias in how collections are selected and described. Beyond the implications in bias, are the narratives that are contained in material culture itself but remain untold not necessarily due to bias, but to the ways in which they are described from a standpoint of access, with layers of stories being ignored, subjugated, or obfuscated either intentionally or unintentionally. Having worked in archives and museums for over a decade, I have been part of this archival process.

Recently, I came across a series of articles that included descriptions for *emotion* and *affect* as related to the archival experience. It reminded me of how, years ago as an undergraduate, I came to the path of thinking about archives as collective cultural memory representation that, like literature, contains multiple layers of story and operates partly on affect. As a practicing archivist for over a decade, I have been hit again and again by a specific affect that Lynette Russel describes as *prepersonal* (Russell, 2018) a term she borrows from Eric Shouse’s article on the power of affect (Shouse, 2005). Shouse describes the prepersonal as the intensity of physical and mental reaction we encounter even when we are not equipped to communicate what that affect is. It is what occurs before we “feel.” Shouse explains that it is life experience that gives us the vocabulary and knowledge to express emotion as representation of that affect (Shouse, 2005). This is what I’d experienced through interacting with the collections I encountered, the researchers I encountered, and the presence or absence of voices I encountered: a prepersonal reaction to my findings that I couldn’t quite describe.

Years ago, as an undergraduate studying literature I sought to understand cultural memory and environment of the text, often asking: what version of the world is the author building and what are we missing? What did these cultural images mean outside of the text? Were they real – or imagined? With literature we are meant to imagine alongside the author’s work. While the author crafts an imaginary world for us to step into, there are vacancies that we fill in from our own imagination, and from our own experience and knowledge.

Reading literature often meant trying to work through the element of affect - to define what is missing, what we recognize as a potential universal, and what is being obfuscated by what is revealed. Narratives draw on our emotions stemming from an imaginary memory of ourselves in that imagined place, and by engaging with this media imagining a coexistent community (Bebout, 2021).

When we can’t place ourselves, this can be considered an affect - an emotional remembrance that becomes a concretion of imagined, real, and selective memory. Contemporary authors like Jayson Reynolds, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Clint Smith point out in various ways how the absence of Black characters and stories in books and other media create a void of Black representation for others to identify with, in turn affecting the ways in which people see themselves, or rather don’t see themselves in our written records (Adichie, 2009; Reynolds, 2018; Smith, 2021). In the same way that literature is about creating meaning through a proposed universal representation, archives are about creating meaning through representation. Collectively, we begin to form a memory of place, time, and history based on these stories.

This had been my experience in literary studies as an undergraduate focusing on Africana literature in a sea of White European and American authors in which we were drowned through the core curriculum that focused entirely on Anglo-European literature. The overwhelming presence of these voices also marked an absence of voice. The literary works were more than a story, an allegory, or a product of time. Literature was presented to us like the *Everyman* morality play, a type of vernacular drama meant to represent the universal experience of mankind. Yet, it was not representative of the knowledge of so much of mankind that was not included in the curriculum. The Everyman morality play, along with other morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries, served as a prototype for many Western tropes in literature and drama. My training in literature involved learning to analyze and interpret it. As archivists, we are trained to leave these questions on the shelf, and to move away from imagining and interpretation, and towards objective archival description using fixed terminology pulled from authority records such as Subject Headings provided by the Library of Congress (see Fig. 4). Archival description, as a result, becomes fixed like the morality play in assumptions and presumptions of universal experience of Western tropes.

IN THE ARCHIVES

Archival collections are presented to the public and made accessible primarily via the archival finding guide (also known as a finding aid) in which the archivist summarizes the collection and provides an organized index of the collection. This finding guide includes front matter consisting of a subject bio or short historical narrative, followed by an indexed list of collection content, giving researchers an entry point to the collection. Front matter is created by the archivist based on provenance, donor information, and their own research of the collection itself (Hunter, 2020).

Archivists play an authoritative role in selecting, preserving, and describing collections that become the historical record. These historical records, as shared resources through use and re-use, and the telling and retelling of stories, become collective cultural memory. The archival collections through the authority of the archivist and the institution of archives are a believable historical narrative and because "public memories are constructed of rhetorical resources" (Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010, p 13) thus archives are transformed from artifact to historical fact to collective memory.

Archives, like the *Everyman* morality play, have been largely and generally accepted as universally representative of the human experience. Similarly, researchers, which may include undergraduate or graduate students, seasoned scholars, or independent scholars, are presented with archival collections as factual evidence of a collective experience. Archivists and librarians trained in the field of information science, learn to curate, collect, and describe collections as a neutral and objective agent to the process, but not necessarily to examine their own role in the process. As archivists handling collections from ingestion to presentation means implementing decisions based on accumulated knowledge, training, experience, and scholarly interests.

Archivists practice a core tenet of ‘original order’ also known as *respect de fonds,* an historical component of archival principles still strongly applied in the process today, that requires archivists to keep like-records together so as not to interfile one collection with another even if they are of a related subject and to keep the original order of the materials as they are received when feasible (Hunter, 2020). Already, elements of subjectivity enter the process. Archivists are actively involved in creating meaning from records by making decisions as to when it is appropriate to maintain the order of individual documents, when to rearrange these objects, and why selected artifacts are relevant. Rearrangements may be based on preservation needs, accessibility, or on content as well as other reasons, and are subjective decisions made by the archivist.

Archives, originating as records of the state, have since evolved into something more. In the late 19th century with an increase in the mid-20th century small locally-focused historical societies began to develop that were focused on the collection and preservation of local histories (Hunter, 2020). These were developed and managed by laypersons in the community and amateur historians looking to preserve local history. At the same time, the US saw a continuing development and rise in the civil rights movement. A shift occurred in public history as well as in academia with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and awareness of the need to address inequalities in representation of minorities in higher education. Following the implementation of the

Department of Education Higher Education Act of 1965, specifically Title VII of the act, and the rise in awareness of civil rights issues during the early 1970s and 1980s, campuses across the country began to develop ethnic studies programs. that aimed to integrate cultural values of minoritized communities (Turk-Bicakci, 2007). These programs focused on representation of ethnic minorities in academic pursuits.

Archives, similarly saw a shift with an increase in oral history projects and regional collections identified as ethnic collections. Archives today collect and preserve regional or local history, corporate records, thematic special collections, in addition to their role as evidence of state entities and power. It is in these collections that we find the materials that shape our knowledge of history and our memory. Researchers, from faculty to independent scholars, visit archives as research sites to understand the past, to add context to their research, and often archives act as an inspiration to launch new research. A slow reappraisal of archival collections, applying visual literacy, historical context, multiple perspectives, and dialogic process between past and present can help us to develop a deeper and more dynamic historical record.

Storytelling and collective memory

Archival records are a mode of disseminating cultural knowledge. There is a transition of quality of knowledge within the transition of modality from oral tradition to the written record. In *Orality and Literacy* Walter Ong (2002) describes his observations on memorization in oral cultures, highlighting the ways in which memorization in oral cultures was an adaptable practice; that the practice was approximate, lending itself to shifts appropriate to needs. Without a static record (a written record) oral cultural heritage did not rely on factual accuracy, but rather on process. Using mnemonic devices such as repetition, storytellers recalled key elements of story, but could also shape stories to the needs of the community, situation, or ceremony. In other words, storytellers were both memory-keepers and memory-makers, recalling the historical and recreating it as it was told in the present.

One example Ong shares is the practice of requiring a time for storytellers to wait between hearing stories and retelling them so that the storyteller could use this time to reflect on the story. This was also time for the storyteller to mold the story into a form for retelling at their own pace and in their own rhythm as part of the memorization process. Ong also points out that, “Oral narrative is not greatly concerned with exact sequential parallelism between the sequence in the narrative and the sequence in extra-narrative referents. Such a parallelism becomes a major objective only when the mind interiorizes literacy.” (2012, p. 144).

Photographs, similarly, have become part of a sequential narrative. We refer to them in retrospect, design a narrative around that specific point in time, and through this set the story in stone and photographs become discrete units of data within a linear narrative rather than implementing them in a manner of episodic storytelling. The transition of knowledge in photographs as treated in archives becomes a re-telling of a narrative formulated after the linear pattern of the written text, where it could be considered one scene of an episodic plot, or a mnemonic device to recall a story.

The practice of archival science involves a similar waiting period. Although different from that proposed by Ong, in the archives we practice a waiting period as the records transition from active record to archival record as historical artifacts. As an example, the timeline from acquisition of an archival collection to it becoming publicly available can takes months or years. Acquisition itself, can take months as archivists build relationships with potential donors, negotiate the transfer of materials to the archives, and negotiate what items will be accepted in the transfer. This can also involve investigating and identifying places that the donor or archivist can approach to accept any materials not accepted by the archives. Then, once the materials have been accessioned the materials may be placed in quarantine for several days to mitigate any pests or potential mold. This process is fairly straightforward, but requires time and coordination of staff time and storage space, both vital resources in an archive. During this period, the archivist is also gathering information about the content, researching context, hearing stories from donors or creators of the collection, and seeking related objects held in other institutions that may be from the same creator or donor.

Once this period has passed, collections are inventoried and described to facilitate intellectual control and internal access. During inventory the collection is further assessed for its value in order to prioritize its place in the processing queue. At this point the materials are often still not available to the public, and will be placed in storage until the collection comes up in the processing queue. The place ranking of a collection in the processing queue can depend on informational value, artifactual value, or other value as determined by the archivist. Informational value is determined by the potential of information contained in a collection that may be used as a reference for study on a particular subject. An easily recognizable example of this would be the informational value of presidential records in the US which would be considered rich in information content about a given administration. Artifactual value is based primarily in the aesthetics of physical characteristics of an object that can provide examples of style, mode, or design of a given time.

To continue with the example of presidential papers, a signed thank you note may not contain high informational value but the personal note with a president's signature provides a potential for high aesthetic value especially as time passes and the president's handwriting becomes less available. Evidential value is another example of value found in presidential records. An example of evidential value is the White House Tapes collection held at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, which were used in *United States vs. Nixon* as evidence of President Nixon's conversations and actions.

Often the waiting time between acquisition, processing, and access is determined by financial and labor resources. Where a collection may hold high informational value placing it higher in the processing queue, the archives may not yet have a staff member qualified to or prepared to process the collection, or in some cases may not have a processing archivist at all, in which case the collection will remain in storage until such resources are made available. Processing itself can take months or years depending on the size of the collection. Archival collections are measured in linear feet (or cubic feet). As an example of the processing time required, a small collection of 10 linear feet could take one month to several months to process depending on the contents, subject, and preservation needs. Archivists can encounter any number of concerns in a collection from intellectual concerns like privacy of information to physical elements like mold which requires immediate and ongoing treatment to keep it from further damaging documents and potentially spreading to other collections. During processing, the archivist researches the contents and context of the collection to the extent needed to provide a brief description, and to apply subject headings which will facilitate accessibility.

These factors ultimately affect the time period between the creation, curation, description, and access to the collection. This can be interpreted as a waiting period during which an archivist or institution has time to consider the elements and value of the story in the collection. The first step is often appraisal, followed by acquisition and ingestion to the institutional archive, and then processing which includes both preservation and description. An archival collection undergoing this process can be immediate, but more often is a long-term process in which the collection once acquired by the institution sits in storage and is assigned a place in the processing queue. The placement in the queue can be determined by informational value, relevance to current events, popularity of the subject, demand for the subject or other factors including monetary and labor resources to process the collection. It is resource heavy practice that is time and labor intensive.

The waiting period prior to acquisition of a collection can also be in expectation of the death or retirement of a prominent figure (an author, end of a political term, or other figure of societal ranking); the closing of a business; and in many cases, the passing of time that renders active records inactive through obsolescence of content, or outdated person-reference such as records of graduated students in university archives or the past calendars and rosters of an organizational board. In these examples, the archivist is by an element of time, waiting for the records to become historical in the sense that they are no longer active or useful in a contemporary context.

The process of acquisition briefly described above, involves a process of appraisal that revolves around researching and understanding context for the collection, its place in the scope of the archival institution or societal interest, and its value to public history and memory. In the course of appraisal, selection, interpretation and reflection, the archivist becomes a storyteller responsible for preserving the cultural knowledge held in the objects. The archivist appraises the collection, making a determination of values including the potential value of stories in the collection, effectively becoming a storyteller through mediation of the collection.

Similar to the storytelling tradition, archives are interpreted and reinterpreted by the storyteller/archivist and by its audience. In the interpretation and reinterpretation, the storyteller and audience integrate memory, nostalgia, and factual evidence creating a temporary or ephemeral reality of that archival experience. The story in the object of the archive is an interpretation of the object or event that communicates a narrative that transcends its intent as ingested in the archive. This interpretation is both a reflection of social memory and a reconstruction of it by what is included in the archive and its interpretation, and what is excluded, subjugated, or subverted.

Archival objects like stories are interpreted and reinterpreted, continually affected by and affecting context and social memory. If the written record is a form of progress, then palimpsests are the continuation of that progress that could lead us to ask what is then the ultimate or end of that progress? Is it a return to the oral interpretation of story? The written record, as an archive, transcends time in its contextual interpretation; the oral story transcends time in both its interpretation and its adaptable mode. Does the written record, or the visually captured record such as a photograph, become as plastic as the oral story through the interpretation of time, context, and even through subverted knowledge? How are the stories of objects that represent 'history' reified or reconstructed to represent something else? If, as Stewart wrote, "the reader's imagination is larger than the vision of the text" (Stewart, p. 3) implying that we read into text and that the transformation that takes place in the reader while reading is the "locus of action", then what is the locus of action in the archives?

Archival artifacts act as boundary objects that facilitate communication across knowledge boundaries. In *Institutional Ecology*, the authors wrote of the objects of scientific study in natural history museums as boundary objects that "originate in and continue to inhabit different worlds" (1989, 392):

> Boundary objects are objects that are plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites…They have different meanings in different social worlds, but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable as a means of translation. (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393)

Similarly, archival artifacts such as photographs can act as the bridge across the parties using them: archivists, researchers, community members, and the general public. As boundary objects the locus of action depends on the ‘reader’ of the photographs, the person observing the image. Star and Greisemer go on to say that the fact that scientific objects “originate in and continue to inhabit different worlds” (1989, p. 392) reflects a fundamental tension. Archival collections as boundary objects take on “different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to make them recognizable” (1989, 393) rendering them translatable, and yet maintaining a unique meaning in a given environment where the locus of action is dependent on the reader.

Representation in the Archives

> *Archives, like trees, store information and communicate through root systems across generations.* ~*D. Kauwila Mahi*

Representation in archives is, and likely will always be, biased. Curated collections are collected through a lens of inquiry while other collections are unintentionally developed and deposited by their creators which leaves the content to chance of recovery and preservation. The curated collections are selective and are one of the ways in which we tell stories that select for those perceived as relevant or pertinent narratives. Not all archives are curated; some are deposited at the archives repository without notice, or are salvaged from thrift stores, estate sales, and even dumpsters. Like archaeology, which can sometimes depend on the accidental record of fossils preserved by time or geological occurrences, archives too can present accidental records. Archives, through the accidentally or intentionally preserved artifacts, create and maintain the collective memory that defines a cultural community. As archivists we are responsible for preserving cultural heritage, but we are also responsible for peoples' experience of that cultural heritage. Collectively, as a field, archives create cultural memory.

Without historical records, without attending to the various forms of knowing, as ways of remembering, we miss an opportunity for a broader social context and experience. Archivists, by intentionally or unintentionally, excluding stories of some communities have systematically curated, included, excluded, subjugated, and interpreted social memory. Archivists, like historians and other practitioners in the cultural heritage field can select content based on inherent bias, research interest, or other subjective purposes, sometimes missing vital stories within the content and as a result effectively erasing or hiding memory-making content.

Archivists can be, like the historians Erll wrote of, "bound to their historical position and their personal perspective. They select certain historical events and exclude others; they transform the chronicle of events into a meaningful story by means of narrative structuring and rhetorical devices; and in doing so inevitably interpret it" (Erll, p 2). The information archivists are continually gathering and interpreting affects the public record and our knowledge of self. Of course, we need to recognize that archivists in their academic training in theory and practice hold conversations and have published work on the neutrality of the archives, and the misinterpretation or mis-applied intent of what it means to be neutral. More and more it has become clear that there is no neutral position in the archives. Our thoughts and experiences influence how we interpret information on a daily basis.

History has shown that voices of marginalized groups have been silenced and make it difficult to break through this pattern. Using segregation in the South as an example, Gibbs identifies how and when Black folks created and participated in community memory keeping and a form of record keeping based in non-documented practices including celebrations like Juneteenth (Gibbs, p 196). The author reminds us of how we have, as a field, effectively ignored the historiography behind self-documentation by these communities, but we only have to look back to recent years to see the same storytelling and memory-keeping efforts to document the Black community, as an example, happening in music, film, dance, art, literature and many other forms that have been missed by cultural heritage practitioners until recently. The scholar quoted above, D. Kauwila Mahi, similarly, writes about the record keeping practices of Hawai'ians from before and during colonization that are now stored in archives across the state being a living record of its history. He writes that

> These documents—material ancestors in a multiplicity of languages—are elders holding knowledge like tattoos across wrinkled, dainty bodies. Through the archives' sterile walls wafts a fragrance of an ancestral past, inundating a revolution of consciousness, enticing us. Our ancestors carry this fragrance like rustling leaves whose veins are inked with cursive, wanting to hold, caress, pray for, and provide refuge for us all. (2022)

Archivists can transform artifacts into a meaningful story, interpreting collections from factual evidence to collective knowledge. Archivists, as stewards of cultural heritage are an authoritative figure and as such has the power to invoke meaning. Former Society of American Archivists President Randall C. Jimerson writes in *In Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*, that archivists act as powerful "mediators and gatekeepers–even when they have tried to hide behind the cloak of neutrality or invisibility" (2009, p 128). Memory is created and formed by what we select for our archives, and archivists play the role of authority on those selections. Irwin-Zarecka wrote that,

> we all make sense of the past with the help of a whole variety of resources, that this making sense is motivated by our personal experience but facilitated (or impeded) by public offerings, and that such public offerings are a mixture of presences and absences. A "collective memory" as a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past-is best located not in the minds of individuals, but in the resources they share (1994)

What archivists select for the archives becomes collective cultural memory through shared resources. The rhetoric of time, place, and meaning converge in photographs as shared resource in archives.

Photographs have been widely available as objects of cultural heritage for almost 200 years, and became more widely available to the public in the mid 19th century. Archivists have historically selected artifacts, events, and histories, and have excluded others, and archivists also wield the power to preserve these stories or to neglect or destroy them. Excluded stories are often lost to time. Hidden stories remain preserved but lost to neglect. By revisiting and reading photographs in existing archives we can unfold these hidden stories.

Complications of Photographs

The discussion of the significance of cultural memory is ongoing and complicated, but inform this paper in that it brings forth the question of reliable narration and the role of historians and archivists in the selection of artifacts for the archives. Archives have historically depended on text-based records such as manuscripts, letters, books, and printed ephemera, as the primary mode of official records of history and of the human experience. The first subject headings guide for photographic images in libraries and archives wasn’t published until 1910, over 80 years after the invention of photography in 1826, and 67 years after the first photograph of a U.S. president (John Quincy Adams was photographed in 1843).

Photography as we know it today was created by French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 using light-sensitive chemicals on various materials to develop images in the sunlight. Louis Daguerre and Henry Fox Talbot brought photography to the forefront of documentary practice later as the art and science of photography grew through advanced technology and skill in using that technology to capture the human experience. As early as 1857 scholars like historian Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-1893) proclaimed that photography gives “evidence of facts, as minutely and impartially as only an unreasoning machine can give” and that it was a “new form of communication”

(Ritzenthaler & Vogt-O’Connor, 2006, p 1). Librarians and archivists remained unconvinced, only much later considering engravings, lithographs, and then photographs part of the historical record.

We live in a visually and materially mediated world, one in which we collect, analyze, memorize, and retain information through our own visual and tactile perceptions. Photographs, appeal to our preference for visual information, provide a form of textual evidence, and when printed offer a tactile perception. They can be preserved for long periods of time when treated with care.

Photographs can also be short-lived; any number of photographs from the earliest printed photographs to the millions of digital photographs stored in our phones and on laptops can be lost to as little an effort as a drop of water or spilled coffee. Many have been lost not only due to physical deterioration, but also due to lack of information about the photo leaving the photo as an object lacking context and story. An example of this loss are those often found in thrift stores, sometimes still in household frames but offering no family names or dates to trace them back to their origin stories. These are also hidden stories.

There is a reciprocal relationship between individuals creating photographs, archivists who curate and describe photographic collections, and the collective memories based on photographs as archival materials. Further, photographs specifically, are complicated by their subject matter, focus of the photographer, subjectivity, and interpretation by the curator and archivists. Photographic images can capture a singular image that can be interpreted differently based on context, but may also contain content within the image that can be read as multiple narratives. Photography, as a medium for communication and as a medium for recording the human experience, has become a core element of the historical record and the archival collections that represent a national or collective memory.

What is captured on film, represents social memory and a history of items and events narrated through the visual medium. Photographs, then, can be read as a primary source text. As textual evidence, photographs provide visual reminders of details, events, objects, and context that might otherwise be forgotten or lost to time beyond the ability to be recorded in descriptive writing. To recall the earlier literary comparisons, readers of the minute descriptions of farming in *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 2014), or the self-reflective descriptions in the whaling yarn *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1964), might attest to the tediousness of minute description in written text. This is not because the descriptive narrative was irrelevant to the text, in fact it is core to understanding the characters, but because minutiae when captured on film allow for a holistic visual reading engaging memory and relatable reference differently than the written text which tends to be linear both visually and narratively. That is an interdisciplinary question for historians and neuroscientists to explore at another time, but photographs contain more than the image in focus and that itself impacts the affect and narrative of these collections.

As an archivist coming from training in literary analysis and cultural anthropology, applying the concept of how the narratives of archival collections shape individual and collective memory as subjectivities and actions seemed natural in the archives because “symbols are essentially involved in social process” (Erickson &

Murphy, 2013, p 302). Narratives are social processes in which groups apply meaning to symbols and artifacts, and become units of meaning through a recursive process of telling and retelling both reinforcing extant stories and creating new collective memories from those stories.

Photographs are complicated in that they capture stories both intentionally and unintentionally, and by nature of their longevity, technological impact, imagery, and ubiquitous applications, are an integral part of community memory as structural and rhetorical devices. Archivists bound to their historical position select and exclude; they transform a textual chronicle of events into a meaningful story, playing and active role neither neutral or objective, in collective memory by means of narrative structuring.

Mary Ritzenthaler writes of the impact of early American photography on the impact on the American vision of itself,

> Photography provided such clear images of American life that the viewer had a feeling of actually experiencing the scenes and events. Photography allowed provincial Americans to see people and places that they would never encounter in their ordinary lives, and it helped them adjust to the transition from an insulated agrarian society to the more integrated society of the industrial revolution. (2006).

In the mid-19th century as the art and science of photography grew, family portraits became popular, with landscapes following soon after (Ritzenthaler, 2006). As the art of photography expanded and as the processes advanced, photography became a skill of selection and aesthetic, in addition to the classic studio photography and functional photography that focused on capturing objective and accurate images of the source.

Photographs, however, are always subject to the photographer's focus. Photographers have the opportunity to "affect the truthfulness and accuracy of the representation of the whole event in a photograph" (Ritzenthaler, 2006), and create stories that are then interpreted by viewers, and in the long-term by archivists as well.

While archival collections, like allegories mentioned earlier, are presented as a universal understanding, what we often find in the archives is an absence of stories. However, these absences are not always evident unless or until the collection is revisited. Revisiting a collection in search of other stories, those that are not the focus of the finding aid, allows us to unfold hidden stories. In revisiting collections, we find multiple narratives to be told. The absence of these hidden stories fails to represent a holistic experience of what it means to be part of the greater narrative, and what it means to our collective memory. This absence is often the absence of a diversity of voices and lack of representation for folks who are not or were not part of the broader hegemonic narrative.

Photographs, a mode of expressive material culture capturing aesthetic and affect, are a form of storytelling through the photographer's lens. Barton and Papen wrote that, "We live in a textually mediated world where writing is central to society, its cultural practices and institutions." (2012). Archives have largely depended on the textual records as the primary mode of the official records of history, of the state, and of the human experience. We also live in a visually and materially mediated world, one in which we collect, analyze, memorize, and retain information through our own visual and tactile perceptions. The development and ubiquity of photographic images has impacted this mediation by creating static and tangible records of the visible. If as Barden and Papen propose, culture refers to aspects of humanity that are not natural but which are created (2012), then photographs are cultural, and are artifacts that require examination beyond their aesthetic. Photographs are a mode of text that demonstrate how people make sense of experience, feed our collective narrative, and build our collective memory.

Structurally, photographs act as mnemonic devices in the collective narrative, launching memory through referential content offering launching points to places, times, and practices. Rhetorically, photographs initiate emotional response and offer repetition and symbolic imagery offering engagement with the past beyond the subject of photographic focus. Reading of photographs as text provides access to what Pinney refers to as an interest in “causation, evidence, personhood, and matters of monumentality” where anthropology overlaps with photography (Pinney, 2011, p. 11). Further, the rhetorical effect of photographs is in the multiplicity of stories captured in the visual.

As text, photographs offer contextual evidence of culture. Material artifacts, such as photographs, in the archives depend largely on the story that is told about their provenance to provide meaning. These narratives are largely designed by archivists and curators responsible for the management and preservation of artifacts based on records of provenance, the archivist’s subject knowledge, and common knowledge. Archivists, in writing the finding guide for a collection, are effectively storytelling. Researchers come to archives for evidence of fact and of human endeavors. Much in the same way that literature is about creating meaning through a proposed universal representation, archives are also about creating meaning through representation. Archives confirm and attest to the human experience. Archives are an institution of story, traditionally the written word but more and more are becoming an institution of object, artifact, and a return to the oratory tradition through oral histories and community-driven collections.

Archives have a process and an order, based on several hundred years of professional practice that has evolved to the practice as we know it today, but ultimately archives are a storytelling device that builds our collective memory - a type of mytho-historical and bio-mythographic observation. Observations that, while they can be unintentional in the sense that after years of focusing primarily on government-state documentation as evidence of formal and national practice, archives turned to collections that more broadly collected the human experience.

Archives are storytelling - a cultural process by which collective memory is shared and can be viewed through an anthropological lens to reveal the workings of cultural identity. The storyteller, the aspects of a story that are told, and what stories are saved and retold, create a framework for collective memory through which we "remember" ourselves. The channels of oral traditions, storytelling, folklore, literature, song, and place are elements of collective memory. Archives, as objects, become narratives that "circulate within the culture, telling members of the group about their culture, and thus also informing the use and interpretation of particular objects" (Woodward, 2009, p. 64).

Archives feed the collective memory, create and recreate identity, and can mark the remembered as same or othered. Diaspora communities, diverse ethnic communities, as remembered in archives are marked, taking a position in collective memory as othered, and in some cases, fall to the selective amnesia of archives. Othering is a form of exclusion of those “who do not fit a societal norm” (Mountz, 2009)[1]. Storytelling is what connects the archives, literature, and collective memory. Taking an ethnographic approach to photographic archives we find that collective public memory is tied to what is remembered though archives, memorial, literature and other related sites of memory. Archives, as an active practice, continue to build a narrative of collective memory beyond the walls of the archive as they feed into literature, memorial sites, and historic preservation.

Examining and re-examining literature for meaning is a process of storytelling in poetry, song, narratives, and other forms. Analysis, in the Western practice of literary analysis and examination, goes back to the early days of both the oral and written word, but examining the literature of non-European cultures like that of Native American and natives of the Americas (including Central and Southern Mexico), African American, and other marginalized cultures is fairly recent. Lévi-Strauss, notorious for his treatment of culture as a system of logical universals, approached myth and storytelling as data that could be used to reveal these universals in the form of oppositional interpretations by humans about the world (Cohen, 2013). But, as others including Boas have since come to propose, the human experience, universal in the sense of the use of metaphor and the understanding of experience through metaphor, but not universally logical. While we may all use logic, logic is relative to context and environment, and is expressed as such in literature and other forms of expressive material culture like photographs found in archives.

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[1] “to distinguish, label, categorize, name, identify, place and exclude those who do not fit a societal norm… ‘Othering’ is the process that makes the other.” (Mountz, 2009, p. 328).

METHODS

If the function of oral transmission is to keep culture strong across many generations, ensuring the community's well-being, then what happens to retention when that knowledge is transferred to written or visual forms of memory-keeping. David E. Sutton writes in *Remembrance of Repasts*, “There is a hierarchy of the senses in the dominant cultures of the West that ascribes vision to the more evolved cultures and taste and smell to the ‘primitive’.” (Sutton, 2001, p. 4). This hierarchy is similarly reflected in archives, where text-based documents are considered the core medium through which knowledge is transmitted. In archives, ways of knowing expressed in other ways are often ignored, subjugated, or obfuscated by attention to the written word.

Ethnography, an anthropological method of the study of other cultures, can be applied as an examination of cultural manifestations in the archives, via the observation, interpretation, and description of the stories told to shed light on the absences. When examining textual and expressive cultural material as storytelling, we are examining not only the written/spoken word, which in itself is a representation of thought through a system of metaphorical symbols, but what it represents as an object in the context of social, religious, political, and economic practices. Expressive culture, like photographs, reflect not only a fictional or spiritual telling of stories and myths, but a perpetual retelling of lived experiences. These lived experiences retold across space and time, are ways of making and reserving a place in social memory and in relation to the physical landscape. Storytelling (and listening) is a way of place-making and memory keeping for the transmission of culture.

Rodolfo Maggio presents three aspects of ethnography of literature that are equally applicable to photographs as cultural evidence. Anthropologists concerned with storytelling should focus on three aspects: 1) the relational dynamics of storyteller and listener, 2) the reaction of listeners in context and 3) storytelling techniques (2014, pp. 92-93). Applying Maggio's aspects to photographs: 1) the relational dynamics of photographer and viewer, 2) the reaction of viewers in context and 3) storytelling techniques through the photographic lens. An ethnographer must collect data, classify and order the data, and then write in such a way that relates these and interprets them intelligibly for the audience. In this same frame, Maggio is asking the narrative ethnographer to collect three forms of data to interpret for the audience.

Cultural heritage artifacts stored in archives age in solitude, where incremental deterioration passes quietly. Stories, as intangible heritage, embedded in the body, the environment, tangible artifacts, and a collective memory live on and transform to accommodate changes in body, environment, and the collective presence; and, instead of deteriorating stories transform incrementally through simultaneous obsolescence and growth. As stewards of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible[2], and as interpreters of cultural heritage archives need to maintain awareness that maintenance of cultural heritage is a delicate balance between preservation and planned loss. This is a loss, not in the sense of what cannot be recovered, but loss in the sense of allowing the artifact (tangible or intangible) to change – to deteriorate, to transform, to grow, to shift – in the ways they will. And, that this change is both the creation and continuation of our collective self.

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[2] This is traditional knowledge that does not exist in a physical form but that does convey cultural knowledge. Defined by UNESCO as "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2003, pg. 2).

This study was conducted primarily via remote work during the early years of a global pandemic during which archives were largely closed to the public, or had limited research hours and travel was restricted in many areas. Much of the work was done using digitized records and notes from my own previous work with some of these collections. Many archival collections are partially available online as digital surrogates. These are catalogued and made publicly available, a process that began roughly around the early-to-mid-2000s as computers and scanners became standard tools in archival repositories. Digitized records proved to be an indispensable resource during the pandemic when travel was limited for many scholars, which in turn limited access to research collections and limited field work. During this time many archivists were asked to pivot their work to an online or remote work process even if their collections were primarily physical in nature and even if they were not prepared for a large-scale digitization project. In the cases where digital surrogates were not available, a finding aid or finding guide allowed me to request individual items to be scanned or to make an appointment for a limited viewing time based on local protocols.

The collections examined for this paper include: Gaydon Moore Brundridge Papers, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, Special Collections and

Archives MS0192; Gorraiz Collection, 1996.096.001, Casa Grande Valley Historical Society, MSS-0001; Sister's Inn Collection, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, Special Collections and Archives MS0189.

The Gaydon Moore Brundridge Papers, held by the Special Collections and Archives of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, focus on the experience of a late-19th century teacher travelling from the California State Normal School in Los Angeles to her teaching site with a ranching family in San Luis Obispo County. This collection was selected for the immediately recognizable implications of both indigenous history and environmental impacts of pioneer settlement in California. Revisiting the collection to seek further information about the site revealed the extent to which the indigenous stories were side-barred as incidental to the story of the images which focused on the experience of this early American teacher. Seeking further information about the Chumash, about the site as an environmental preserve, and about the rock formation as a sacred site led me to the San Luis Obispo Archaeological Society who hold additional records about the Chumash.

The Gorraiz Collection, held by the Casa Grande Historical Society in Arizona, was selected for its focus on studio photography by a mid-century professional photographer which almost entirely sacrifices description of the vernacular photography contained in the collection and only tangentially mentions the photographer’s Basque roots and his connection to historical Basque immigration in the Southwest. Revisiting this collection via an online collection of digitized photographs that had been selected by researchers for a proposed book about Gorraiz, it became clear that the photographs were still largely unidentified and minimally described. Minimal information available in the description, created a need to compare the photos to similar images from the same era found elsewhere online and in other digitized collections.

The Sister's Inn collection, the smallest of these samples which is also held by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, is an example of a collection that on its surface appears to tell the story of a locally owned café, but beyond that includes observations about the life of Black residents in San Luis Obispo County and City post WWII. The collection contains what appears to be misplaced items related to the NAACP as there is little evidence of its relation to the Sister's Inn, until doing further research on local Black churches revealed that there was an effort to establish an NAACP chapter in San Luis Obispo around the same time that the photos in the collection were created.

It was by seeking to unfold the layers of each object that these stories are revealed. What these collections have in common, despite their largely disparate subjects, is that each reveals layers of story obfuscated by a focus on the collection as a whole, filtered through a singular lens of archival processes. Merging archival and ethnographic methods allowed for a close examination of stories held in material artifacts of the archives, often still in the order in which they were acquired and retaining some context.

Archival methods include an examination and narrative description of collections as a whole, followed by subject headers to index the subject matter with minimal attention to the multiple stories of individual or grouped artifacts within the larger collection. In the case where attention is given, these groupings are selected and organized as "series" and described collectively at the series level. In the same way as we might approach material artifacts in traditional archaeological research, or unfold cultural layers of story in oral histories, applying ethnography in the archives is a way of studying material artifacts beyond the surface, to unfold layers of the story found in the artifacts. A key difference here is that the archival artifacts have been removed from the original site and have undergone a process of archival arrangement and description by the time a researcher has had an opportunity to review the material.

For this project, I selected multiple archival collections that I was familiar with from my own work as an archivist and as a researcher, and from which I began to recognise that the archival approach to description and processing while aiming to make collections available obscured the many stories and histories contained in these collections. The archival process was not designed to hide the narratives of the people and places in these collections. In fact, the archival process is aimed at making these collections available to the public founded on another core tenet of archival practice, based in library and information science, which aims for access to information (ALA, 1939, 2019).

Approaching these collections from the framework of collective memory and the dynamics of memory work, I sought to identify areas in which archival holdings of expressive cultural materials, specifically photographic materials, provided informational value in terms of stories that revealed cultural elements and at the same time obfuscated or subverted stories either intentionally or unintentionally. In the tradition of studying material culture as what we have left behind and the imprint those objects leave on the world (Deetz, J., 1995), we can look to archival materials as an intentional collection curated to inform our understanding of the human experience.[3]

Beyond the historical and cultural imprint on the world is the imprint and affect for local users. The emotional watermark and knowledge imprint on the memory of the researcher that ultimately adds to the commemoration and amnesia we experience about ourselves through the interpretations of processed archival collections. As the anonymous interviewee of Lynette Russel is quoted as stating in the introduction, “the pieces of paper and material objects hold a sense of time, place and purpose” (Russell, 2018, p. 204).

The story in the object of the archive is an interpretation of the object or event that communicates a narrative that transcends its intent as ingested in the archive. Archivist act as both filter and storyteller, applying interpretation to the acquisition and description of collections despite the past claims of neutrality. Archivists essentially story the collections into a collective memory (where ‘story’ is used as a verb). The interpretation is both a reflection of social memory and a reconstruction of it by what is included in the archive and its interpretation, and what is excluded, subjugated, or subverted. Archivists are moving towards the recognition of their own subjectivity and the impact they have on archival records through their biases and interpretation.

Focusing on the particulars of these collections is, itself, a form of cultural interpretation. Searching for ways to express obfuscated stories within these collections to reveal meaning that may otherwise be forgotten, applying ethnographic methods through a search for this cultural phenomenon within the archives, and taking a literary view of the stories that unfold from material culture, materials were selected for their immediate and potential story lines.

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[3] Foucault would argue that this goes beyond understanding, to implementation of power structures.

‘Interviewing’ the collections through a fresh lens revealed cultural elements that were representative of multiple experiences taking place parallel to the subject presented in the finding guide. Another way to think of exclusion and subverted knowledge in objects, is recognising stories that remain dormant while others are highlighted and centered. Revisiting collections to consider the excluded or subverted stories can provide deeper or a greater breadth of knowledge about our collective memory of self as a community and as a larger society.

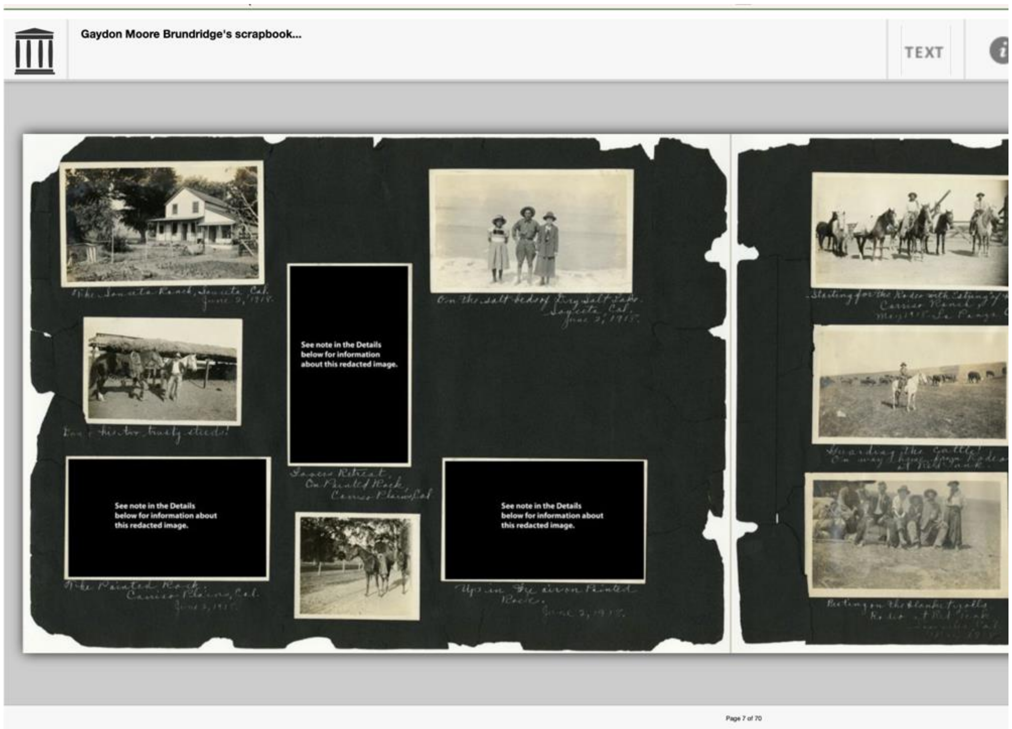
Additionally, this approach revealed how photographic artifacts can be read as a visual representation of a core identified subject, and also be read for cultural representations and context not readily made available by the archivist’s description or organization of the materials. The artifacts also act as material evidence of time, place, photographic practices and photographic style, as much as they provide evidence of the subject.

In *Places of Public Memory*, the authors focus on the intersections of rhetoric, place, and memory, providing case studies of how communities remember history. While some scholars may parse the differences between forms of memory, keeping specifying distinctions of social, popular, cultural and collective to name a few, considering storytelling as a format that is inclusive of multiple aspects (social, popular, political, kinship, etc.) is a way of understanding storytelling as public memory (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 2010, p. 6).

People retell the story of themselves as a way of understanding and applying cultural practices. Storytelling can define a common identity. As Iwona Irwin-Zarecka writes, “A ‘collective memory’ – as a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past – is bets located not in the minds of individuals, but in the resources they share” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 4). Stories of our ‘self’ in the collective sense of self largely depend on visual markers of time and presence. This may take the form of the built environment, memorial sculptures, written histories, or photographs. Memory markers like those listed act as devices to remind us of our stories, reinforcing symbolic texture. What happens to the stories that are excluded from shared resources? And what becomes of our collective memory when stories are excluded?

Photographs offer memory markers, visual representations of the past that appear as factual evidence. Like other forms remembrance, photographs too can obscure and exclude part of the story. Not only by what remains outside of the frame, but by what remains untold.

Figures



Gaydon Moore Brundridge's scrapbook...

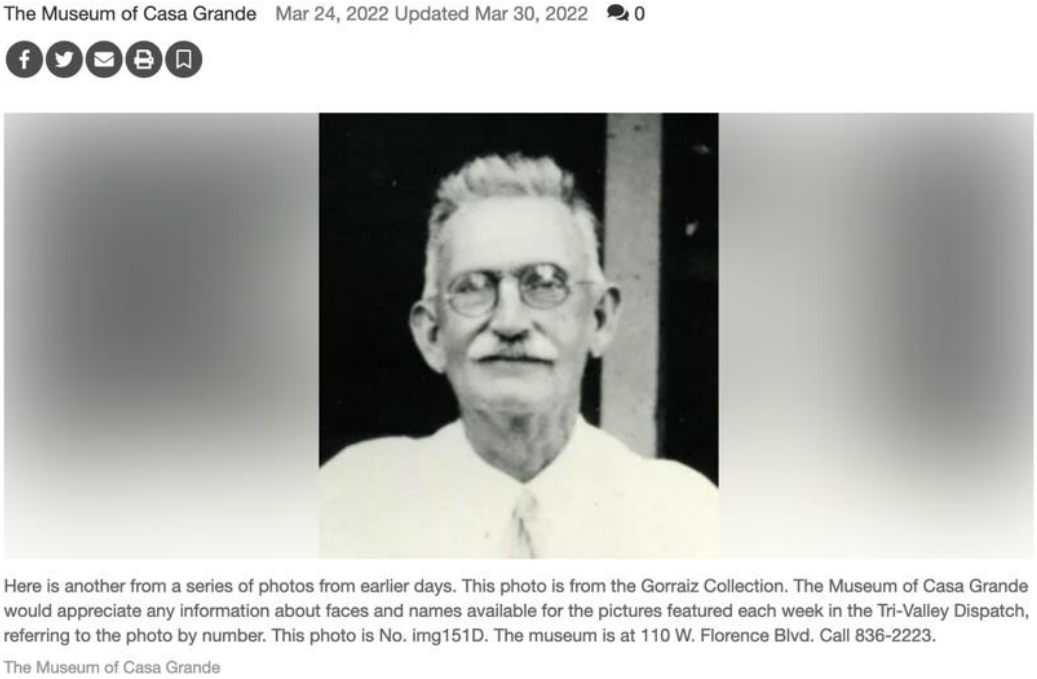
See note in the Details below for information about this redacted image.

See note in the Details below for information about this redacted image.

See note in the Details below for information about this redacted image.

Page 7 of 70

Figure 1 Digital record of the Gaydon Moore Brundridge Scrapbook. Images of Painted Rock have been redacted in response to the request of the Chumash. From Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Robert F. Kennedy Library Special Collections.



The Museum of Casa Grande Mar 24, 2022 Updated Mar 30, 2022 0

Here is another from a series of photos from earlier days. This photo is from the Gorraiz Collection. The Museum of Casa Grande would appreciate any information about faces and names available for the pictures featured each week in the Tri-Valley Dispatch, referring to the photo by number. This photo is No. img151D. The museum is at 110 W. Florence Blvd. Call 836-2223.

The Museum of Casa Grande

Figure 2 Photograph of an unidentified man from the Gorraiz Collection published in Pinal Central, Casa Grande Valley Newspapers Inc. asking readers for help with identification.

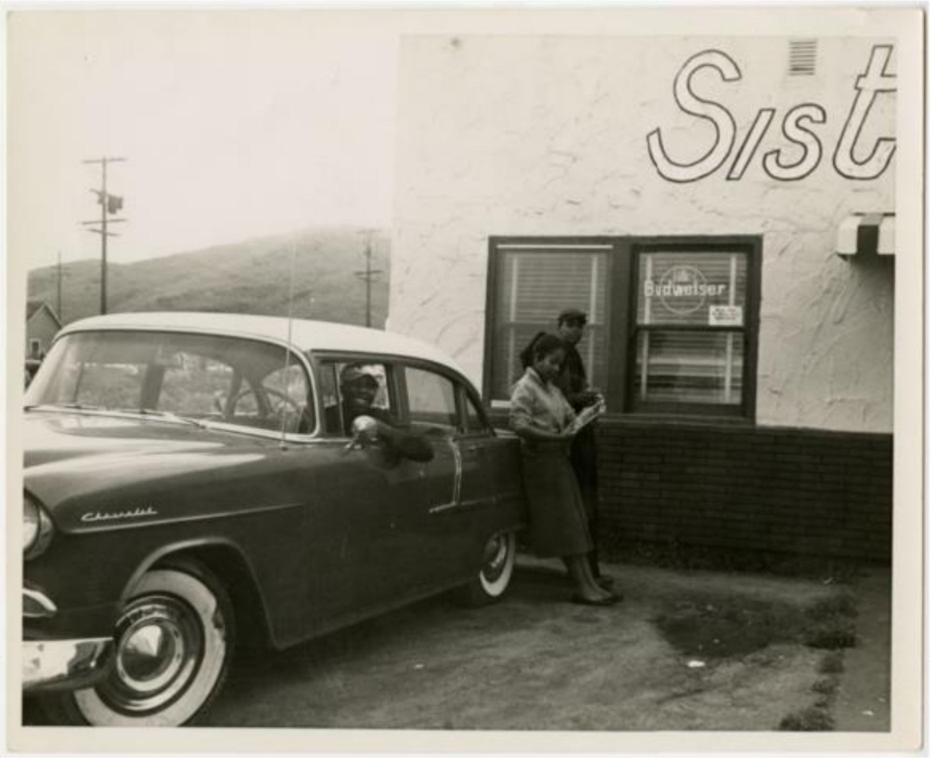
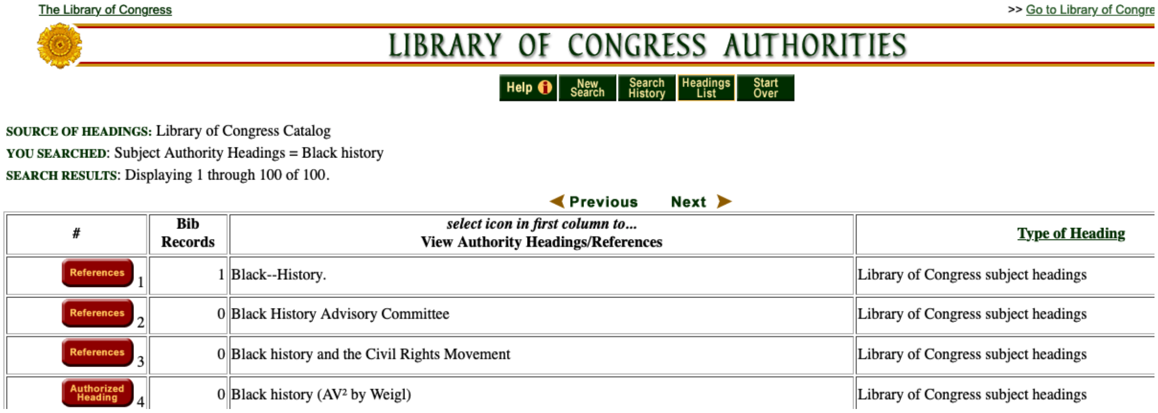

Sist
Budweiser

Figure 3 Photograph of Sister's Inn located in San Luis Obispo, circa 1955. From Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Robert E. Kennedy Library Special Collections.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References
Authorized Heading

SOURCE OF HEADINGS: Library of Congress Catalog
YOU SEARCHED: Subject Authority Headings = Black history
SEARCH RESULTS: Displaying 1 through 100 of 100.

#	Bib Records	*select icon in first column to...* View Authority Headings/References	Type of Heading
1	1	Black--History.	Library of Congress subject headings
2	0	Black History Advisory Committee	Library of Congress subject headings
3	0	Black history and the Civil Rights Movement	Library of Congress subject headings
4	0	Black history (AV² by Weigl)	Library of Congress subject headings

Figure 4 Screenshot of Library of Congress Subject Headings Authority file. Library of Congress, accessed July 1, 2022. https://authorities.loc.gov/

HIDDEN STORIES IN THE ARCHIVES

Existing discourse in the archives field focuses on what archivists refer to as "hidden collections" which are defined as "an archival resource that is inaccessible and undiscoverable due to the unavailability or insufficiency of description" (SAA, n.d.). This definition provides a term used for collections that remain unprocessed or minimally described leaving them largely indiscoverable by the public and researchers. Like Ong's take on oral narrative, which is not so concerned with parallelism between the sequence in the narrative and the sequence in extra-narrative referents (2012, p. 144), archival photographs similarly are not bound by a sequential narrative. Instead, the modality of photographs (and arguably archives as a whole), is such that it is valuable beyond succinct summary of a given moment. Archives offer a narrative of multiple possible worlds, and photographs specifically offer multiple narratives by which collective memories are developed and begin to be shared as evidence of a collective truth.

In photographic theory, angle and design can be applied to address line of sight bringing the viewer into the image with the subject or excluding the viewer as an outsider to the image depending on the angle. The angle of the camera lens changes the direction of the gaze and affects the perception of the viewer. Similarly, archivists have the potential to have an effect on the narrative of a collection or object. Visual semiotics are not necessarily needed to understand the content of an image or to understand and interpret how an image impacts cultural memory. An attention to archives as storytelling and attestation to the human experience, and its impact on collective cultural memory, by slowing down our processes can help to reveal the hidden stories in the archives.

The discovery of hidden collections is an ongoing effort for archivists, and in the mid-2000s prompted scholars to launch an effort known widely in the field by its acronym “MPLP” (More Product, Less Process) which prompted archivists to focus less on processing, that previously required attention to preservation and description, and instead to aim for a stronger focus on making collections (the ‘product’) publicly available and then practicing deeper processing based on need or public interest. This had the effect of urging archivists to provide a shallow or thin description based on getting the ‘product’ out to the public. It also had the more fortunate effect of exposing many hidden collections that had been in the queue for deeper processing making them more readily accessible. This is one aspect of hidden archives.

The hidden stories referred to in this paper are another matter. The hidden stories in this paper refer instead to the stories left untold in the archive due to neglect, lack of awareness, exclusion, or for other reasons whether the collection has been processed and made publicly available or remain hidden themselves. Collections can often offer much more in terms of history, context, representation, and depth of story when revisited after processing, not only by researchers seeking a specific aspect of the collection, but by archivists who are responsible for the stories held in the artifacts. Through a slower processing through revisiting collections, archivists can apply intentional storytelling in the archives as an attestation to the human experience echoing the tradition of storytelling via the artifacts, documents, and other tangible evidence we collect, and our collective cultural memory.

Archivists, curators, and other cultural heritage practitioners collectively, select what is curated, described, displayed, and valued as history creating collective memory that can obfuscate or devalue other threads in the story intentionally or unintentionally. Stories in the archives are limited or expanded on by the archivists who are the stewards these collections, and work in the realm of interpretation and description of photographic records. Emphasized here is the impact of archival records on what we remember about ourselves as a society, because we are as much what we forget as we are what we remember.

The following collections provide an example of the hidden stories in collections that have been processed and described, and are available to the public but that hold unintentionally hidden stories. By excluding the hidden stories from description, these are effectively stricken from the public record, from public memory, and from our collective knowledge of ourselves. As Irwin-Zarecka points out, “Collective memory is not a given, not a ‘natural’ result of the historical experience.” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 67). It takes the work of archivists, librarians, and other professionals as well as the retelling by the general public to create and reinforce and articulation of our shared past. Archivists, perhaps more than others, hold an authority and an ability to create and maintain our collective memory. Their processes and perspectives, including the organization and labeling of objects, time periods, persons, and other subjects directly impacts the ways in which we see ourselves as a society.

The following sections, each describing a collection, are given a title only in the broadest terms: The Chumash, The Unnamed, and Black History as a demonstration of how thin description frames a collection, object, or in this case section of a paper. It also mirrors the ways in which writers, historians, and others frame their work using titles that invoke a sense of an objective and holistic view of subject. The reader is limited by what is presented as a thin and minimally described ‘object’ (the collection of words following each title). The titles simultaneously make the object discoverable and also obfuscate the meaning and stories of the object. This replicates the practice of applying subject headings to archival collections. Library science cataloging terms are abstract terms such as “Black - - History” (see Figure 4).

Archivists can drill down to add further context as follows

Black - - History - - San Luis Obispo
Black - - History - - Restaurants - - San Luis Obispo

and make the decision to do so based on informational analysis. The general public, however is not trained in the logic of library science subject headings which were designed by librarians for librarians at a time when researchers still depended heavily on librarians to locate and retrieve resources. Almost 200 years later we are still using this system.

Only by delving further into the layers of potential stories within these abstractly titled sections does one begin to recognize the depth and layers in each collection. Thick description and a slow process offers a method for making these collections not only more discoverable, which is a core tenet of cataloging practices in information science on which archival science is based, but can also give the collections a sense of time, place, and purpose. It can move us away from the practices of an aged classification system, and towards culturally relative and relevant descriptions.

The Chumash

As an example of absences, an archival institution in California is in possession of photographs of a Chumash sacred site popularly known as Painted Rock. The archive holds a collection of photographs of the site taken by tourists from the Los Angeles area who travelled north to the central coast, traditional Chumash lands, in the early 20th century by car and toured Carrissa Plains, where the sacred site is located. The photos were placed in a scrapbook and then donated to the archive as part of a larger family collection. The site contains pictographs created by the early Chumash, which the Bureau of Land Management estimates to have been created about 3,000-4,000 years ago. The Painted Rock site was not the subject of the collection, but rather a small element of the larger collection and only included by chance that the scrapbook dated 1913 - 1924 had been preserved long enough, presumably by family, to make it to the archive.

The photographs were deemed significant to local history by geographic proximity, and in line with the collections scope of the archives which contained multiple references and research works related to the Carrissa Plains and Painted Rock as a site of interest for environmental and anthropology studies at the institution, as well as to the local Anglo-settler history. The photos, being recognized as relevant to the scope of the institution, were digitized and made widely available. Metadata containing descriptions of the pictographs were created by non-Chumash related archivists working with the collection. Relatedly, archaeologists and other explorers have other photos of the site, some of which became well known through the publication *La Piedra Pintada, The Painted Rock of California: A Legend, Myron Angel, Grafton Publishing, Los Angeles* published in 1910 by Myron Angel, a New Yorker who followed the gold rush to California and later became a journalist and historian.

In 2001, partially in response to the need to protect the California Condor, and to protect Soda Lake and other natural elements in the region, the approximately 204 thousand acres surrounding Painted Rock were proclaimed a national monument. In Proclamation 7393, after several paragraphs attesting to the value of the natural environment and resources, the human memory of the site evolves as part of the story:

> *In addition to its geologic and biological wealth, the area is rich in human history. Archaeologists theorize that humans have occupied the Carrizo Plain National Monument area since the Paleo-Indian Period (circa 11,000 to 9,000 B.C.). Bedrock mortar milling features, village middens, and elaborate pictographs are the primary manifestations of prehistoric occupation.*

The paragraph goes on to mention settler expeditions and the development of the plains into ranch lands and mining sites. In 2001 when the proclamation was made, there was no reference to the living Chumash still present in the area, to the cultural relevance of the site, or to their continued connection to the land. We can be grateful to the Clinton administration for this proclamation and preservation of this vital environmental site, while also questioning the absence of Chumash in the proclamation.

There was some debate as to whether the pictographs were created by the Salinan, Yokut, or Chumash, all of whom have inhabited this land. In the early 20th century, a local rancher who realized that tourists were adding their own markings to the rock in the form of graffiti, built a gate to limit access to the site. The rancher recognized the value of the pictographs and of preserving them for posterity by minimizing graffiti, but not necessarily the sacred value of the site. It is now widely accepted that the Chumash consider the area where the pictographs are located as a sacred site. However, this is after a concerted effort by the Chumash to assert their knowledge and impress upon the other stakeholders like the Bureau of Land Management and local ranchers the sacred meaning of the site to the Chumash people.

Around 2015, members of the Chumash tribe approached the archives institution holding the collection of photographs and asked that the digitized photos be removed from the web given that the location was considered a sacred site. Complicating the conversation, from the perspective of the archives, was the fact that images of the site had been published by an explorer in 1910 and that book was, and still is, used as reference by the archaeological community. Original copies of the book are rare (the archival institute mentioned here holds a copy of the rare book), and the images in the book were replicated and circulated widely before the archives acquired the scrapbook. Further complicating the matter was that archivists were unfamiliar with Chumash tribal practices and concerns.

Perhaps somewhat ironically, during the same period as this request for redaction of images in the archives was being considered, the campus was building a new dormitory to be named in the Chumash language and the Ethnic Studies department was working with the Chumash to develop a program to help the campus community learn to pronounce the building names. The same library that was struggling to come to terms with the request for cultural respect, was involved in the efforts to promote the use of the Chumash language on campus. Ultimately the photographs that had been digitized were restricted from public view, to be made available only by request and not broadly distributed online.

The focus of the collection, its description, and its distribution as an archival collection was based on the singular lens of the settler experience of westward expansion in the United States. This is folklore in practice and an example of the storytelling that forms a mytho-historical collective memory of place and time. Archives are the construct of archivists and institutions, placing them in a role of power to affect culture through selected memory (Cox, 2004). In this case, the story of the west and its development in early US history, and a lack of attention to the impact of the presence of settlers to the Chumash in the immediate and long term.

This makes perfect sense in terms of archival theory and the tenets of information science, that both apply hierarchical ontology and Western epistemology in processing collections. Archival theory is largely rooted in the Western perspective. Theories and practices are informed by the Dutch Manual, and early English and American theorists like Sir Hilary Jenkinson (1892-1961) and Theodore R. Schellenberg (1903-1970) persist.

Jenkinson and Schellenberg, noted rivals, held different opinions on the role of the archivist, but both helped established archival principles and techniques that are still used today. Both sought to establish archivists as guardians of knowledge, and while Schellenberg argued for some interpretive appraisal by the archivist, neither drew on the archivist's influence on interpretation of collections as a factor in access or the impact of interpretation and selection on collective memory beyond evidentiary value of governmental records. Both insisted on the neutrality of the archivist. Both relied on the textual as archival record, and both focused their methods and theories on records as documentation of the nation and its bureaucracy (Hunter, 2020).

For the Chumash, these records are more than evidence of a nation and its bureaucracy. Photographs of this site violate cultural protocols with respect to tribal cultural resources[4]. Origins of the art at this site known as Painted Rock, dated to approximately 3,000-4,000 years ago, remain unverified by archaeologists, and it has been speculated that "religion is also to be considered, although nothing positive is known in the matter. Many of the pictures may have been made by shamans; and it is quite possible that medicine men were not connected with the making of any" (Grant, 1965, p. 80). Grant speculated further that "Rock art may be present at such locations to commemorate the mythical event” (1965, p. 124). However, the Chumash know the site to be sacred and rely on oral history for the preservation of this knowledge. Today the site is part of the Carrizo Plain National Monument, protected for the flora and fauna of the San Joaquin Valley (Painted Rock Pictograph Collection MS 041).

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[4] Tribal cultural resources are defined in PRC Section 21074(a) as a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe that is either included or determined eligible for inclusion on the California Register of Historical Resources or included in a local register of historical resources, or other resources determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant tribal cultural resources. (Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions, Inc., 2020).

The Unnamed

A collection of over 50,000 photographic images held at a small historical society in Arizona consists of the printed images, negatives, and business records of a mid-Century American studio photographer. Figure 2, a photograph of an anonymous man, is an example of how existing images in the archives contain both individual and collective narratives yet untold. As a small rural town, over an hour's drive-time distance from the two nearest metropolitan areas, this photographer was the local option for studio or event photography. As a result, the images span over 40 years including everything from weddings to studio sittings to proposed golf resorts as a visual history of the region.

The collection was donated to the historical society in 1993 by family members of the photographer, Gorraiz, following his death a few years prior. The collection was accepted by the society based on its relation to the region and its many images of local families. For years afterward the large collection was stored in banker boxes on shelves under the stone stairwell in the basement of the historical church on site at the museum. In the mid 2010s, interns were brought on board from the local library school to process the collection which proved to be much larger than anticipated. A survey of the collection during its acquisition estimated approximately 22,000 images. During processing the estimate grew to approximately 50,000 images, effectively doubling the estimated size of the collection and its potential as a resource.

What stood out more so than its size, were the unexpected images that were uncovered as stories in the collection until the project was funded by a local historical records grant. Prior to its processing the collection description had been a vague reference to “1950s photos”. The collection, which had been for the most part considered a collection of studio photography, turned out to be a large collection not only containing studio photographs, but images of local real estate development which was at its height in Arizona during the 1940s and 1950s, of crime and accident scenes, and of a local annual O’odham Tash Celebration which the photographer founded in recognition of the local Tohono O’odham community.

The historical society museum is located in a small town surrounded by O’odham lands and reservation land. The collection includes photographs of the many local social clubs that were prominent in the mid and late 20th century: Kiwanis, Women’s Clubs, Lions Clubs and others as a record of the change-makers and philanthropists of the city. The Women’s Club members whose photographs were part of the collection, were responsible for providing the first hot lunches and lobbying for the first traffic lights in the city. They were also the founders of the historical society that now held the collection. Stories in the photographs, in these archival objects, abound and are ripe for interpretation, application, and reiterative storytelling constructing and reiterating local cultural memory. The other surprising element in this collection was that of crime and accident photography. This photographer renowned for his studio and wedding photography was also called to duty for traffic accidents to create evidence of potential crimes.

Black History

The Sister's Inn collection, the smallest of these samples which is also held by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, is an example of a collection that on its surface appears to tell the story of a locally owned café, but beyond that includes observations about the life of Black residents in San Luis Obispo County and City post WWII. The collection is less than 1 linear foot of materials, but has the potential of the stories of Black and other marginalized communities on the Central Coast.

The collection, named for the restaurant on which it focuses, consists primarily of photographs and a few magazine articles dating from approximately 1950 – 1982. The restaurant was located in what was then known as Japantown, an area of the city that has been lost to time and development, and was run by two sisters Annabelle Thelma Hughes Warren and Alice Edna Hughes Bowers. The archival description gives a nod to the brief history of the family that was available at the time of processing the collection. By investigating clues in the images and researching the few names in the collection it became evident that there was a Black community that lived and worked in the city post-WWII whose story was untold in the archives. The city, now ~82% White and less than 3% Black, was in 1950 a much smaller city with a population of only ~14,000.

African-Americans have always comprised a small percentage of the population of San Luis Obispo despite larger populations of Black communities in California cities like Los Angeles and Oakland where African-Americans migrated and settled in the mid-20th century. The 1940 census reports twenty-six “negros” (the term for African-American Black people used at that time) in San Luis Obispo County, and in 1950, there are over 300 African-Americans recorded in the county. In San Luis Obispo, many of the Black families were there in relation to Camp San Luis Obispo, a training site for the US Army in the 1940s-1950s, now home to a training site for the National Guard.

This collection, which focuses on a local restaurant that changed locations at least twice, includes evidence that supports the story of Japantown an area that was developed and populated by Japanese and Japanese-Americans until these families were incarcerated as a result of the onset of WWII. Following this mass incarceration, the Black families who had lived alongside the Japanese, now had opportunity to develop Black-owned businesses like the Sister’s Inn and another business owned by the same family known as Club Morrocco.

The collection also contained what seemed to be unrelated photographs of an NAACP gathering, ostensibly held in San Luis Obispo. There was a movement to establish an NAACP chapter in San Luis Obispo out of the Los Angeles chapter, but there is little evidence here beyond the few photographs that remain undescribed. Lastly, the collection includes photographs and magazine articles about an actress who was related to the sisters and played parts in popular movies such as The Greatest, The Toy, and The Mack. For such a small collection of photographs, the potential to pursue stories of the Black experience on the Central Coast are numerous.

DISCUSSION

Hidden Stories

Returning to the examination of modality and subverted stories in archival collections, photographic collections as expressive material culture offers an example of how archival presentation affects the stories we preserve and retell in the archives. The retelling of historical reference through the archives reflects and reifies collective memory often obscuring or neglecting stories outside of the lived experience of the archivist or the focus of the institution. This absence of stories leaves a gap in the historical record, making it ever more challenging to trace or recall cultural memory. Archives are a form of storytelling and myth-making that informs the self and the collective memory of a society.

Archives act as boundary objects that create, subvert, or erase cultural memory – reiterating some aspects of historical events and obscuring others as they are presented through the lens of the archivist and treated as that singular object. As an attestation to the human experience echoing the tradition of storytelling, the artifacts, documents, and other tangible evidence we collect, and the collective cultural memory these stories create or obfuscate develop as affect in researchers who find themselves in conversation with these artifacts. It is these stories that give meaning to collections, that build a collective memory of who we are as a society.

The archival profession has historically privileged textual documentation as records within a narrow definition of what a record is and what we include as ‘text’ or textual archives (Sangwand, 2018, p. 93). The shortcomings in documenting a broader representation of records are rooted in a tolerance of what qualifies as a record or as text. For Sangwand (2018), archives are created where performers and audiences are involved and she uses the example of hip hop and rap performance as a record. Through performance of music, memory is not only transferred but also preserved and sustained in its reiterative process. Through repetition and consistency of transaction in ephemeral practices such as performance, archives are far from what Schellenberg or Jenkinson imagined in their early design of American archival practice. The same can be said for orally transmitted cultural knowledge that is widely not accepted as an archival record I terms of Western archival practices that seek tangible and preferably printed materials including manuscripts, books, letters, and print-dependent ephemera, as archival records.

Photographs, similarly, are not what Schellenberg or Jenkinson imagined as archival text or record, but have become ubiquitous in archival collections as record of the human experience beyond a literal record of evidence. Ritzenthaler reminds us that while in early photography photographs were used mainly as “a copier of nature” (2006, p 8) that as it has progressed both as an art and as documentary evidence that photographs “must be analyzed to test the truth and accuracy of their content, as must all historical records” (2006, p 8). As photographs have become accepted as documentary evidence of the human experience, they are also open to interpretation, another reiterative process of modality. And, furthermore act as boundary objects which can create, subvert, or erase cultural memory.

Boundary objects, a concept defined by Susan Leigh Star in 1989, are “objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p 393). Star defined objects as both tangible ‘things’ and could also include “something that people act toward and with” including theory (Timmermans, 2015, p 6) which can “Boundary objects thus satisfy the informational requirements of various communities while still having distinct meanings in each one of them” (Timmermans, p 6). Photographs as boundary objects maintain their common identity as informational images of a ‘thing’ or ‘place’ or ‘time’ satisfying the informational requirements of various communities, and hold distinct meanings for each.

Broadening the accepted definition of a record and expanding to different modalities to include oral stories, folklore, music, photographs, and the artist as active memory is precipitated by the values and ideas of non-Western cultures where storytelling is an oral and active form of memory-keeping and preservation. When we exclude the multiple modalities of memory-keeping, limiting ourselves to the written word, we effectively begin the process of forgetting ourselves. Similarly, when we limit ourselves to a singular perspective of and about an object, excluding the various stories that provide context and ignoring its actuality as a boundary object, we effectively forget ourselves.

While photographs, in earlier times, were used mainly as “a copier of nature” (Ritzenthaler, 2006) it has progressed both as an art and as documentary evidence. Photographs must be revisited and “analyzed to test the truth and accuracy of their content, as must all historical records” (2006, p 8). Photographs have become widely accepted as documentary evidence of the human experience, and are used as rhetorical and structural narrative tools. They are also open to interpretation, and to re-interpretation, another reiterative process of modality.

In *Many Paths to Partial Truths*, in which the Elizabeth Kaplan makes comparisons between archival science and anthropology, the author reminds us of Geertz assertion that “if you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners do," (2002, p. 211). By looking at what archivists do we can better understand what archival science is and what it does to and for our collective memory. Where early anthropologists practiced under the cover of neutrality, Malinowski later introduced the concept of participant observation as a type of filter through which the work was presented incorporating descriptions of method and perspective into the filter of collected data. Archivists, too, practice under a pretense of neutrality for the majority of its practice as a profession where the focus was on the preservation of records (Cook, 1997).

It was not until the late twentieth century that archivists began to consider subjectivity of archival practice, and began to consider the role of the archivist in creating the historical record based on what they selected. Lastly in this comparison, Kaplan quotes Ruth Bunzel writing on her ethnographic work in Chichicastenango that “there is no magic formula, but there are any paths to partial truths.” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 220). As boundary object, photographs also present many paths to the partial truths for the various unknown audiences.

Additionally, this approach of revisiting collections to ‘interview’ the objects reveals how photographic artifacts can be read as a visual representation of an identified subject, and also be read for cultural representations and context not readily made available by the archivist’s description or organization of the materials. The artifacts also act as material evidence of time, place, photographic practices and photographic style, as much as they provide evidence of an archival subject.

Archives offer us a similar observation and understanding of cultural heritage through the stories retained and offered to the public. For many years, archives have been considered a neutral ground as a place where an [all good] archivist or librarian was responsible for gathering history and artifacts that most represented our history. Branching out from its roots in the practice of historians, there was a time when archivists saved everything, gathering documents and personal artifacts as evidence of the human experience. Woodward reminds us that Barthes (1993) defines myth as a “system of communication” and a “mode of signification” that is attached to objects. Barthes proposes that social myths are built upon modes of signification is passed off as 'natural', when in fact these are socially constructed by the stories in the objects around us (Woodward, 2009). Archives are these objects – the objects that hold our stories and create our social memory.

Reviewing these collections from the perspective of collective memory and the dynamics of memory work, each finding guide was read and analyzed for content interpretation and story which is found in the abstract created by archivists and published in the front matter. Then, the descriptive titles for each collection container list were reviewed for alignment with the front matter, for alignment with the context given for the collection, and for clues to evidence not mentioned or mentioned only indirectly. Drilling down to individual folders and objects, I was then able to discern stories that were only evident in the lacuna. These stories are part of the archive, but not the story intended at the time of curation or creation. This is to be differentiated from “hidden collections” which refers to unprocessed or uncatalogued collections, a separate, though perhaps related, occurrence in archives nationwide.

The three collections selected for this project provide an example of hidden stories in processed archival collections. These collections have been described and are available to the public, but still hold unintentionally hidden stories. By excluding the hidden stories from description, these are effectively stricken from the public record, from public memory, and from our collective knowledge of ourselves.

Identifying these stories brings attention to alternative, additional, and counter narratives that have a direct impact on our understanding of our collective memory, and provides insight as to what we chose to remember and what we forget. It opens a conversation about ways of seeing and ways of asking questions about how the past is made to matter.

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of evidence and stories creates an absence in our collective memory, a type of designed amnesia based on the choices of decision makers in the archives. The greater implication here is in the ways that we, collectively, select what we display and value as public history creating our collective memory that can obfuscate or devalue other threads in the story. Importantly, we must recognize that archives have largely focused on the hegemonic majority. We have an opportunity to re-examine our collections and approaches to shape the future of archives and of our collective memory. Archives can be read for content, time, observation, and absence to reveal stories we have yet to tell based on the wide diversity of experiences we share. We may have been limited by the traditional finding aid in the past, but with ever increasing access to ways to tell these previously hidden stories.

Photographs do hold a sense of time, place, and purpose. Engaging with the material as a researcher or as an archivist initiates affect, the sense of time, place, and purpose that occurs in our conscience before we express this as emotion. This affect is the where we discover that we are as much what we forget as we are what we remember.

The potential is in revisiting collections to re-examine the artifacts, photographs and otherwise, to draw in the marginalized, obscured, or neglected stories. This has applications across our cultural heritage preservation practices. There are extensive publications in the field, including reports by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the national association that funds museums, libraries, and related organizations through grant making, and the American Alliance of Museums that report an overwhelming amount of unprocessed collections. One might ask how and why we should revisit collections – archives, archaeological, ethnographic or otherwise – when so much remains uncatalogued and unprocessed.

While we strive to curate and describe the human experience, we have often failed to be inclusive or respectful of intersectional identities and experience in our approaches, instead preferring to rush to collect more or to be the first. Some of this is the urgency to preserve history at risk of loss, but much of it is also the race towards the collection of curiosities that parallel the historically coloniziation-based practices of archaeology and museology.

We have an opportunity to slow our pace, to examine what we have already, to draw depth of knowledge, and to include both the people from whom we have historically extracted data from and to include different modalities of story in order to both reflect on and to enhance what we remember about ourselves.

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