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**Whitewashed White City: the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the role of the archivist**

Researchers look to archival records to recall the collective memory of an event and rebuild its history. When the materials do not represent the history of all involved, the role of the archivist becomes two-fold, not just to preserve valuable records, but to protect the integrity of the records. How can archivists today work with collections and researchers to build accurate portrayals of historical events? Are the histories built by the artifacts selected for saving subjective?

Archival science, the study and theory of building and curating artifacts, is seen to be objective and presents a value-neutral system and methodology (Rowat, 1993). The profession of archiving allows creativity and expression for individuals through the goals of the workplace organization, personal representation, and choices on subjects to archive with no single archivist standing out for their contributions unlike museums or galleries where good work can be featured (Rowat, 1993).

As time and technologies change, the meanings and use of archives change at the same time our information culture changes and more electronic records are becoming accessible (Lubar, 1999). Records are being used for research by historians, sociologists, documentarians, and authors as they can provide a concrete logic and truth to narratives. Participating in making records comes with power to determine history, but there is also power in using records (Lubar, 1999). Many filmmakers and documentarians have turned to archives for the subjects of crime stories like *The Thin Blue Line*, *The Jinx*, or *Making a Murderer* (Peebles, 2018).

Although documents and facts make up a large part of a narrative, many authors embellish or add details to make the work their own (Reardon, 2007). In the case of Erik Larson, author of *Devil in the White City*, facts where the killer visited world's fair locations with women he murdered were reconstructed from popular accounts of the fair and may not have happened with the characters at all (Reardon, 2007). Items that were found in archives helped an author tell a non-fiction story of a murderer and his victims containing details that are possibly untrue, but without a deep dive into world's fair archives and their contents, the average public does not grasp this secret.

Archives are not stoic, but living documents. Where documents with hypertext are obvious about their liveliness through connectivity, traditionally archived works tell stories about their creators, those who use them, and the society in which they were formed (Lubar, 1999). According to the Society of American Archivists, the purpose of the archivist is to select, preserve, and make sources available, while the listed roles and values speak more about how an archivist makes a document come alive ("SAA Core Values Statement And Code Of Ethics | Society Of American Archivists". 2012).

Archives are a form of communication that can be passed from generation to generation through the physical durability of the artifacts (Foote, 1990). With advances in digitization, the lifespan becomes longer. Adding in metadata and shared repositories, that scope becomes broader. Archives today are a global form of communication that can be passed on to strangers hundreds of years from the original creation.

With today's technology, archivists are not only responsible to digitize previously categorized physical objects to make them accessible, but also to take on the infinite amount of moments that are born digital from photographs to transaction documents. It is an impossible

goal for archivists to determine from the "expansion of culture" available which things need to be preserved (Featherstone, 2000). Yet, technology has made the profession or archives and curation overlap showing how archives can become, like objects in museums, artifacts of material culture (Lubar, 1999).

Archives are time capsules; opening them not only feeds a sense of adventure or discovery, but breathes out its hidden life from another era into someone new. Featherstone considered the accumulation of objects and the objective role of the archivist when he wrote, "The world fair or trade exhibition was particularly important here as it concentrated the whole world in one place, not only in terms of the collection of exhibits, but the way in which it becomes a place 'to which the whole world sends its products and where all the important styles of the present cultural world are put on display'" (Featherstone, 2000).

The Columbian Exposition of 1893, also known as the Chicago world's fair, was one of the most awe inspiring events of the late 19th century. Kathleen Bates wrote "thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears" in *America the Beautiful* after her visit to the White City. Chicago's world's fair brought mechanical marvels including electric lit buildings and the Ferris wheel, architectural astonishments like the white buildings that housed the fair and a variety of reconstructed ships in 1:1 scale, and cultural cadres hired by representatives of the regions on display. 27 million people, forty percent of 67 million living in the United States, came to Chicago to attend the fair during its six month run. For many who did not make the trip, they could experience the fair through postcards created specifically for the fair (Rydell, 2005). "Greetings from the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago," could reach all corners of the globe welcoming the White City into people's homes thanks to postcards (Teich, 1893). The newly constructed ornate white buildings were a beacon of civilization and progress for the

United States. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 is often mentioned using the word, “utopia,” or a state of things where everything is perfect (Nordstrom, 2009).

If the world’s fair was a beacon or a utopia, why was it so exclusive? The treatment of minority groups during the run of the fair did not echo the civilization and progress of all people, but instead widened the racial and cultural divide. The exclusion and treatment of Native American and African American cultures by the world’s fair can today be seen as racist and classist, but these vices were commonplace for rich, white men of the late 19th century and did not stir the recognition that they would today.

Although Native Americans had an impressive Indian School Exhibit put together by the Office of Indian Affairs, the roles given to them by the fair were relegated to performing in traditional roles and costumes, even if that meant demeaning appearances (Rinehart, 2012). With so few opportunities at the fair, the only other Native Americans present were cast in Buffalo Bill’s show as “savages” just outside the entrance (Nordstrom, 2009). Although the 15th amendment passed in 1870 giving Native Americans some constitutional rights, Native Americans were not treated as equals in 1893. They still could not vote until the Snyder Act of 1924 in some states and 1965 in others. At the world’s fair, seventeen tribes were represented in the Outdoor Living Exhibit displaying correct representations of encampments (Rinehart, 2012). These exhibits were very popular and fairgoers took note of the intricacies. One account lists these exhibits as “somewhat attractive” but also mentions that “the oppressive atmosphere” hastened time spent there (Gookin, 1893).

The nation of Haiti chose well-known African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass as their representative, the only black man represented in a prominent leadership role at the fair. The 13th amendment passed in December 1865 abolishing slavery in the United States twenty-

seven years before the fair's opening ceremony. Despite the growing black population, the roles given to African Americans at the fair were on the Midway Plaisance entertaining in roles of foreign countries "curiosities", performers, or custodians. Only three African Americans were accepted to act in diminished leadership or secretarial roles, Hale G. Parker, J. Imogene Howard, and Fannie Barrier Williams (Reed, 1999).

Part of the fair was composed of exhibits sent by states and administered by their delegates. While the delegates for the states were all white, the displays that were sent were representative of all people and notably, these distinctions show up in archived journals repeatedly as people marveled at the work that was created by someone different than themselves (Farrel, Gookin, Heath, Krapp, 1893). Speeches and seminars were conducted on the education of African American youth, the intellectual progress of African American women, and the future of Africa collaborating on the strengths of the African American people (Reed, 1999). The fair held a number of days specifically for ethnic or cultural groups including a "Colored Americans Day" on August 25$^{th}$ that caught positive and negative attention from white and black groups alike (Reed, 1999).

Notably, Frederick Douglass used his leadership role to make important strides for the black community during this time. He was given the opportunity to speak at opening ceremonies, was able to publish a pamphlet regarding the missing presence of black people representing the fair, and gave a speech for "Colored Americans Day" marking the triumph of African American achievements post-slavery oppression. The Haitian government allowed Douglass to distribute the pamphlet to ensure that it would circulate in the park ("World's Fair 1893 | Early Chicago | Dusable To Obama: Chicago's Black Metropolis - WTTW", 2018). An excerpt from Douglass' "Colored Americans Day" speech that summarizes his feelings towards the treatment of African

Americans reads, “Measure the Negro. But not by the standard of the splendid civilization of the Caucasian. Bend down and measure him - measure him - from the depths out of which he has risen” (Reed, 1999).

By the systematic exclusion of prominent leadership roles at the fair, the major impression fairgoers received of minorities was unfavorable (Rinehart, 2012). Making matters worse, the depictions of caricatured fairgoers in cartoons published by the media perpetuated racial stereotypes and made it harder for minorities to break out from those roles or expectations (Graziosi, 2015). Peter Newell’s Johnson family cartoons remain symbols of racism and classism that reflect how African Americans were an “unwanted presence” at the world’s fair (Cooks, 2007). By writing African American characters who did not know how to behave like other fairgoers (Newell, 1893), the cartoons acted as symbols for post-slavery America and an establishment of segregation. The Johnson family became part of a social project to teach class identification and racial segregation in a public sphere by illustrating what black people should not do in public places (Cooks, 2007). Using ape-ish depictions of black faces, drawing simple clothes on the black family and showcasing lavish dresses of white women, and inserting broken dialogue for the Johnsons, Newell’s cartoons publicized a clear separation of black and white representations (Newell, 1893)( “Home Economics Archive: Research, Tradition And History”, 2003).

Women were also considered differently than men at the fair. One significant attraction of the fair was the Women’s Building. Several postcards were created for the fair, many featuring vignettes of Columbus above the new buildings (Calavano, 1893). The Women’s Building postcard was the only one that featured a vignette of a woman, unnamed, but presumably the President of the Board of Lady Managers (Teich, 1893). Large and impressive,

the women's building had several objects of note including "fine threads", "valuable old fans", and a library on the second floor displaying a bust of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe (Gookin, 1893). The Harriet Beecher Stowe exhibit displayed multiple editions of her book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, standing out as the jewel of the Connecticut women's exhibit. Publishers were scrambling to print as many copies as possible before the book, presented as "America's most important contribution to world literature," entered public domain (Hochman, 2006). A re-enactment of scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* featured abolitionist Frederick Douglass in the role of Uncle Tom showcasing the importance of the writings of women as well as the changing roles of African Americans (Boisseau, 2013).

The American Library Association chose to have its annual meeting at the Women's Building library because it housed a collection of works "authored, illustrated, edited, or translated by women from all over the world", something that had never been put together in one place before (Wiegand, 2010). Included in this building was a statue of Wadsworth's Hiawatha created by African American and Native American artist Edmonia Lewis, selected for display by Imogene Howard (Wiegand, 2010). Significantly, the library contained over seven thousand volumes in sixteen languages from twenty-three countries, all organized by the fairly new Dewey Decimal Classification card catalog (Wiegand, 2010).

The male fairgoer perspective noted different things from the Women's Building. Krapp journaled that the building contained "a model kitchen where model meals were being prepared" and a nursery where "one could leave his baby checked for the day" with "twenty or more infants from two months up to two years old all in one room, some screaming, some crying, others crowing and laughing" with "numbers check pinned on each one" while amusing stories

were told of "mothers who lost their check and couldn't get their babies out; or of mothers who didn't want to get them" (Krapp, 1893).

Women's suffrage was still gaining momentum (they would not receive the right to vote until the 19th amendment in 1920), yet the fair committee recognized the need for women to be part of the leadership and established the Board of Lady Managers with flourished addresses to the chosen few noting their importance such as "most illustrious madam" (Farrel, 1893). Allowed to stay in the women's dormitory, members of the Lady Managers were at the fair nearly every day (Farrel, 1893). Since the duration of the fair was six months open with an additional three for set-up, women had to devote nearly a year toward the event. Working for a state booth with her husband, Mrs. Heath visited the fair 96 times noting in a small ledger how her children were growing up along with attendance and significant attractions (Heath, 1893). Women, especially young agile white women, were given roles as performers hired to portray dancers or personas of different countries represented in the Midway (Olson, 1893). In the scrapbook of Lillian Farrel, Farrel saved a speech given by Kate Brannon Knight that reads, "It does not sound like much in the telling, but we brought to its fulfillment the best we had. That which we carry away will brighten the recollections of a lifetime" (Farrel, 1893).

Even if there had been a greater presence of equality or fairness among minorities or women, rooting out bias from privileged fairgoers was an impossible task for the 19th century. Krapp wrote, "One may have read of the conglomeration of peoples in such a city as Chicago but surely no description is adequate to convey the faintest idea of the true state of affairs. It was not only the disgusting mixture of Chinese, Dutch, Poles, Swedes, Japs, Negroes, Irish, Italians, Spaniards, and some English that was so revolting, but the open lasciviousness of their looks and horrible coarseness of their conversations" (Krapp, 1893). All commercially printed

representations of the Columbian Exposition of 1893 on photographs and postcards featuring people on them reflect the rich, white patron ("Detroit Publishing Co. Postcard Collection", Teich, 1893). Looking at the Century of Progress, the returning Chicago world's fair in 1933, the archived postcards reflect a shift in ideology and representation focusing less on who should be at the fair (Schmalgemeier, 1933).

What can the new generation of record keepers do to make sure all voices are represented if the archives only reflect the majority of one group? According to the New London archives of New Hampshire, "The archivist should add to the body of archival and historical knowledge and leave to successors a true account of the records held in custody and of their organization and arrangement" ("Role Of The Archivist | New London History & Archives", 2018). Rowat wrote, "According to professional theories, sound archival methods are supposed to deliver a representative documentary heritage. When short-comings or biases are pointed out (as in the context of gender, race, or multicultural issues), well-intentioned archivists have rushed to respond, assuming that the satisfactory remedy can be incorporated within the existing context of archival institutions and the archival profession. They have refined systems and methods, devised documentation strategies that include under-represented groups and perspectives, attempted value-free cataloguing vocabulary, and established multicultural units" (Rowat, 1993). Several institutions do not seek out supplemental collections as these passages suggest and have sought out other methods to preserve true accounts. Oral and ritual traditions through institution missions of libraries, churches, and cultural centers have collective memory, the same that is found in documents (Foote, 1990). Shared collections from the same era or the same region help build a bridge when the surviving material of minorities is minimal compared to the abundance of majority groups.

Revisiting *Devil in the White City*, author Larson used 857 footnotes citing 139 different sources to weave together the non-fiction crime thriller about serial killing at the world's fair (Reardon, 2007). Since speeches from the victims are not in any archive, Larson employed a technique called creative non-fiction to use other archived accounts to give missing people voices. Embellishment is considered truth. Is it the role of the archivist to reflect or acknowledge inaccuracies?

Visiting with different archives in the Chicago area to piece together my research of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the resounding response from libraries and museums is that this book has incited an appetite in people interested in finding out more details on the Chicago world's fair. The special collections are being pulled frequently and even those like the Curt Teich postcard collection which is still largely uncategorized received special treatment to get significant postcards relating to popular events such as the world's fair and Chicago into viewable condition (Teich, 1893). In response to the question of inaccuracies, libraries and archives have made special effort to link related collections. If archivists are taking an actively objective approach to say nothing toward creative non-fiction, then they are taking a passive approach to make more facts about the time available and show patrons how much information is out there for them to gather on their own. This is a fine line between creating history or filling the gap of historical information and preserving an unalterable past.

Each archive is itself a cache of data, an independent story that the archive creates a memorial for with acid free boxes, plastic sleeves of protection, and a descriptive finding aid that gives a glimpse of what treasures are inside. These treasures are handled with care and protected by required logged visits, special requests made in advance to look at the materials, individual

handling of the boxes one at a time, and precise rules about how to lay a book on a table or how to go through a box of postcards.

Archivists are asked to take on the role of preservation, but also the role of social and cultural representation. Lubar states, “We are our archives. Our archives, our memories, reflect our world. What can we say about our society, based on our memory, our archives? What do we bother to preserve? What do we want to remember?” (Lubar, 1999).

How can archivists fill the gap of information if an archive appears one-sided? One method is to seek out special collections to acquire for the organization. Like car dealers, librarians and archivists could write a list of ideal acquisitions that would fill the gap in collective memory and hope that someone comes along to trade them in. Acquisition is just one part of the archives process, but if the items that become archived are the items remembered in our collective memory, then selection and acquisition becomes one of the most important steps for the accuracy of an event to be sustained. What is absent from archived materials makes a statement. What is present in archived materials makes a statement. If an archivist wants their collections to remain objective and neutral, every effort must be made to capture all the voices present in an event. As archivists are merely the protectors of created materials, the social and cultural representation role leans toward the person making the documents or the librarian curating the collection.

Through research of shared collections, the full picture of representation at the Chicago world’s fair is not hidden. Although the artifacts created by and for African Americans and Native Americans are scarce, their presence in albums created by fairgoers helps an unrecorded legacy live on after the creators have died. Archivists preserve these items and continue the effort to collect and share information about their Columbian Exposition of 1893 collections to reflect

today’s values on culture, even if they were not reflected in the archival values of the time. It is us, the library science students and teachers of Dominican University who are residents of Chicago and the suburbs who should take a stand for representation in these important and popular archives. It is our duty as archivists and librarians to continue to find connections here so that everyone can find their history in the White City where we live and breathe.

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