

Respect Which Fonds? Personal Archives and Family Businesses in Nova Scotia



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RÉSUMÉ Les efforts continus pour redéfinir et déconstruire les limites de la théorie archivistique accentuent davantage les archives personnelles, mais une question clé a été largement mise de côté : la présence naturelle des archives personnelles parmi les archives des entités corporatives. Même avec l'élargissement du cadre conceptuel par rapport à la provenance, les activités de classement et de description de base reposent sur des fondements peu solides lorsque les archives personnelles et les archives d'entités corporatives sont entremêlées. Les archives des entreprises familiales aux dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles en Nouvelle-Écosse sont de très bons exemples d'ensembles de documents corporatifs qui comprennent des archives personnelles « cachées ». Pour plusieurs familles qui dirigeaient des entreprises, il y avait peu ou pas de distinction entre la gestion de documents personnels et la gestion de documents d'affaires ou professionnels. En se servant d'exemples d'archives personnelles tirés des documents d'archives d'entreprises familiales conservées aux archives de l'Université Dalhousie à Halifax, cet article montre que ce genre de document conteste les distinctions claires et précises entre les archives personnelles et les archives d'entités corporatives. Il discute de la provenance et des limites du fonds d'archives et suggère que les archivistes peuvent travailler avec des collections de documents hybrides qui peuvent être attribués à la fois à des individus et à des entités corporatives. L'article introduit ensuite le concept d'identité du travail (« *work identity* »), la formation d'une identité centrée sur le travail, qui peut devenir une perspective utile à partir de laquelle on peut considérer comment le travail influence la façon dont une personne ou une famille crée, accumule et se sert des documents et de l'information.

ABSTRACT Ongoing efforts to redefine and deconstruct the boundaries of archival theory are increasingly emphasizing personal archives, but a key issue has mostly been neglected: the natural presence of personal archives among the archives of corporate bodies. Even with a broadening conceptual framework of provenance, there is little theoretical or practical foundation from which to proceed with basic arrangement and description activities when personal archives and the archives of corporate bodies are intermingled. The archives of nineteenth- and twentieth-century family businesses in Nova Scotia are particularly good examples of aggregations of corporate records that include "hidden" personal archives. For many families that operated businesses, there was little or no distinction between personal recordkeeping and business or professional recordkeeping. Drawing on examples of personal archives found

among family business records held at the Dalhousie University Archives in Halifax, this article demonstrates that materials of this nature challenge strict distinctions between personal archives and the archives of corporate bodies. It provides a discussion of provenance and the boundary of the fonds, and suggests that archivists may be working with hybrid aggregations of materials that can be attributed to individuals and corporate bodies. The article then introduces the concept of work identity, a work-centric identity formation that can be a useful perspective from which to consider how work influences the manner in which a person or family creates, accumulates, and uses records and information.

Introduction

In 1971, the Oland family of Nova Scotia, which had figured prominently in the brewing industry of the Maritimes since 1867, sold its brewing assets to John Labatt Limited.¹ The family retained a large quantity of business records created by Alexander Keith and Son, Oland and Son, and many other companies that supported the enterprise. Family members were also active as military, agricultural, and community leaders, roles that were independent from but closely related to the family business. These public activities and the family members' busy private lives resulted in an impressive body of personal archives. Seven years after the sale, Bruce Oland made the first of what would be many donations from the family to the Dalhousie University Archives. The records became known simply as "Oland and Son" and were assigned a locator number (MS-4-135) in the business manuscript group.² Over time, a massive 148-metre aggregation of records accumulated, representing almost twenty companies owned or operated by the Olands as well as the personal archives from multiple generations of family members.

The Olands are one of many Nova Scotia families that created and organized their personal archives together with their family business records. This tendency is a demonstration of the close relationship between personal life and work life in Nova Scotia, and suggests that individuals and families in the region develop deep ties to their work. However, the presence of personal archives among the records of family businesses is often masked by arrangement and description practices that, as Debra Barr has said, assume that "a given document should indeed be physically and intellectually assigned to

- 1 The Nova Scotia Olands are distinguished here from the New Brunswick Olands, who are still active in the brewing industry. For a complete history of the Oland family, see G. Brenton Haliburton, *What's Brewing: Oland 1867–1971 – A History* (Tantallon, NS: Four East Publications, 1994).
- 2 Archival materials held at the Dalhousie University Archives are broadly classified using a system of thematic subject areas (e.g., labour unions, shipping and transportation, theatre, etc.). Each thematic area has its own manuscript group number (e.g., MS-2, MS-3, etc.). The business archives are grouped under MS-4.

only one *fonds*.”³ Personal archives found among the archives of Nova Scotia family businesses seem precisely the kind of material that Barr is referring to when she says that “the danger in such a system is that the complex history of many records, along with access to them, will be obscured when they are placed and listed with the documents of only one creator.”⁴

Individuals and families who create and organize their personal archives alongside those of their family business assemble heterogeneous bodies of records, which defy the rigid distinction between personal and corporate archives and therefore challenge a fundamental assumption about the nature the *fonds*. The multiple contexts and histories of these materials can be difficult to interpret, and even more difficult to represent with archival descriptive standards that presuppose a simple delineation between *fonds* and do not adequately address situations where an item or file may belong to more than one *fonds* or collection. Archivists working with materials of this nature can benefit from a deeper understanding of how individuals and families perceive their work and its relationship to their personal lives. This article draws on examples of intermingled personal and business archives found at the Dalhousie University Archives to explore the concept of “work identity,” a work-based identity formation that has the potential to help archivists interpret and represent these materials. The article begins with an overview of personal archives found among business *fonds* with which I have worked. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the principle of provenance and the concept of the archival *fonds*. Literature from a variety of disciplines supports a discussion of work identity and how it can provide archivists with new perspectives for analyzing and interpreting the creation, accumulation, and use of aggregations of archives with multiple provenance.

Personal Archives and Family Businesses in Nova Scotia

Many processes can lead to personal archives becoming “lost” among the records of businesses, organizations, government offices, and other corporate bodies.⁵ In Nova Scotia, this phenomenon is most evident in the archives

3 Debra Barr, “The *Fonds* Concept in the Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards Report,” *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–88): 163.

4 *Ibid.*, 164. This approach is still widespread despite an abundance of literature proposing theoretical alternatives and the prevalence of relational information systems that allow multiple creators to be assigned to a given group of records. For more discussion of the interpretation of the *fonds*, see the articles by Debra Barr, Geoffrey Yeo, Laura Millar, and Jennifer Douglas cited throughout this article.

5 There has been some discussion of this phenomenon, particularly in the United States. For example, R.D.W. Connor has discussed the intermingled nature of presidential papers; see “The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library,” *American Archivist* 3, no. 2 (April 1940): 81–92. The presence of private records in government archives has been discussed in Theodora Johnides

of family businesses such as Oland and Son. This is quite understandable given historian L.D. McCann's observation that much of Nova Scotia's socio-economic growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was influenced by "family ties, the interchange of personnel, and capitalization assistance."⁶ Individuals and families across the province were engaged in mercantile activities such as trade, shipping, and brokerage, or in fishing, mining, and other natural resource industries. Personal and family relationships played a major role in the formation and financing of many corporate bodies in this time period. Taken as a whole, the business holdings at the Dalhousie University Archives tell the remarkable story of how individuals and families shaped the social, economic, and political development of Nova Scotia from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. These materials reflect the deeply personal relationships that underlie the functions and activities of many corporate bodies established in the province. They also illustrate the fuzzy boundaries between personal life and work life, and, more importantly, between personal archives and the archives of corporate bodies. Many people conducted business under their personal or family name, and they appear to have made little or no distinction between personal recordkeeping and business recordkeeping. Unincorporated sole proprietorships and partnerships were quite common, and formal corporate bodies were established primarily to support the personal interests of the individuals or families. The resulting bodies of records invariably include business archives as well as the personal archives of the business owners and, in many cases, their employees.

The huge aggregation of records created over more than a century by the Oland family and its business entities presented a number of theoretical and practical dilemmas when the records were processed in 2009 using funding from the now defunct National Archival Development Program.⁷ Could the personal archives be distinguished from the business records? Could they be described in a manner that would respect the complex provenance of the aggregation of which they form a part? During the project, the personal archives were physically and intellectually separated into what is now known as the Oland Family Fonds. The delineation made it possible to consider the family outside the shadow of its brewing empire, but the new boundaries between the groups of records are fuzzy at best and were established with little theoretical basis and few practical examples to guide staff in their deci-

Thompson, "Private Records – Public Archives," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 73, no. 2 (October 1972): 228–34. See also Philip C. Brooks, "Archives in the United States during World War II, 1939–45," *The Library Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (October 1947): 263–80.

6 L.D. McCann, "The Mercantile-Industrial Transition in the Metals Towns of Pictou County, 1857–1931," *Acadiensis* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 55.

7 I processed the materials with Nora Kennedy (now at Moncton Public Library) in 2009–2010.

sionmaking. A better approach might have been to retain the physical unity of the aggregation and create a guide for each intellectual funds, but such an approach still would have misrepresented the myriad relationships between records and creators, even if a given file could be listed under both funds.

For the Oland family, work was clearly central to family identity, and personal archives were deliberately created and intermingled with business records, regardless of the time period or nature of the corporate bodies in question. The strong ties between the family and its business endeavours are perhaps best expressed in the records of the schooner *Bluenose II*, which the nautical-minded Olands built and operated for several years under the banner of their Schooner beer brand before selling the vessel to the province for a dollar.⁸ The close relationship between family and business can also be expressed in individual documents, such as a letter dated 22 May 1890 from George Woodhouse Culverwell Oland to his brother Conrad. The first part of the letter reports on the results of the family's efforts to influence the 1890 general election; George writes that "we piled up a heavy majority in Ward 3" but "all three of our men were beaten." The letter then turns to "a little to business": George discusses the ingredients of a stout brewed at the Army and Navy Brewery and writes that he "will enclose a memo of our I.P.A. brewings [sic] for you to see."⁹ George and Conrad learned the family business by helping their mother, Susannah, brew homemade beer in a shed behind the family home in Dartmouth in the 1870s. These deep family connections permeated all aspects of the brewing business for the next century, through periods of growth and periods of great personal struggle and hardship.¹⁰

Family ties like this wield their influence over virtually all of the business archives held at the Dalhousie University Archives. In some cases, such as the Robert Dawson and Sons Fonds, family business records were mixed with personal archives as the materials were passed through the generations.¹¹ In a

8 Most of these records can be found in the *Bluenose II* series in the Oland and Son Fonds, but relevant materials can also be found among the personal correspondence in the Oland Family Fonds, including thank-you letters, visitation requests, and correspondence with the Naval Association of Canada and the *Bluenose II* fund.

9 Dalhousie University Archives [hereafter cited as DUA], Oland Family Fonds, MS-2-135, box 41, folder 21, George Woodhouse Culverwell Oland to Conrad Oland, 22 May 1890. In the second portion of this letter, dated 26 May 1890, George concedes that he "will not have time to send minutes of Brewings [sic] this time." The memo is not enclosed, but the file also contains an 1887 list of ingredients and their prices for three batches of beer, personally addressed to Conrad from George.

10 In 1917, the Halifax Explosion killed Conrad Oland and destroyed two of the family's breweries. Oland and Son declared bankruptcy during the post-war recession, but with the purchase of Alexander Keith and Son in 1927, the family business embarked on a period of growth that continued until the sale in 1971.

11 DUA, Robert Dawson and Sons Fonds, MS-4-77. The fonds includes the business records of a nineteenth-century hardware merchant in Lunenburg, NS, a log book of the schoo-

few cases, such as the James E. Dickie and Company Fonds, the records were inadvertently intermingled during accessioning, but more often than not the business archives and personal archives were created simultaneously, by the same individual(s) or family, and often at the same site.¹² The best evidence of this recordkeeping system is the presence of family correspondence among the business correspondence of family-operated corporate bodies, a natural consequence of conducting personal affairs in an office or other work setting. Records created at the former Smith Wharves on the Halifax waterfront are an excellent example of this practice. The wharves were the home of A.M. Smith and Company, a large family-owned Halifax salt fish firm, and also served as the original office of the Canadian Atlantic Salt Fish Exporters Association and as the Honorary Consulate of Finland. Deeds and other legal documents in the A.M. Smith and Company Fonds show the official relationship between the family members and the various corporate bodies they operated, but among the business correspondence are personal letters exchanged by Fletcher Smith and his children, Marcia and Doug, which say much more about how the family created and viewed its personal and business records.¹³ Fletcher and his brother, Albert, were the third generation to enter the family business, which started as a cooperage, shifted into salt fish in the early twentieth century, and then into real estate in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁴ Fletcher served as honorary consul to Finland in the 1960s and used the consulate stationery to send personal letters to his children from his office at the wharves.¹⁵ These letters, dictated to a typist and addressed to both Marcia and Doug, touch on a wide variety of personal topics, including the imminent birth of Marcia's first child, but they also provide information about the growing family real estate business and often reference enclosed financial statements of various family companies. One letter, dated 3 February 1965, provides three pages of information on a proposed apartment building and concludes with one paragraph of family news. Fletcher comments on the pending arrival

ner *Micmac*, a minute book of a local temperance union, share certificates, and personal archives of three generations of the Dawson family.

- 12 DUA, James E. Dickie and Company Fonds, MS-4-63. These records were also mixed with personal archives by members of the Dickie family, who are known for their vast lumber operations in Nova Scotia and Labrador. The James E. Dickie and Company Fonds includes the personal archives of Harriet and James E. Dickie and their son Edwin, and of the Rev. Dr. Henry Dickie and Rachel Dickie, as well as the archives of the family general store, the Nova Scotia Telephone Company, and a railroad company. None of this is all that surprising: the archival legacy of the family and its business activities is spread across four "fonds" that total nearly sixty metres of business records and personal archives.
- 13 DUA, A.M. Smith and Company Fonds, MS-4-23.
- 14 The company still exists today, with Marcia serving on the board of directors and Doug serving as president.
- 15 DUA, A.M. Smith and Company Fonds, MS-4-23, box 85, folder 47, letters from Fletcher Smith to Marcia Stewart.

of his grandson: “naturally, you are apprehensive as it is coming time for your first born. But cheer up, by the time you have a dozen, you will never give it a second thought.” Marcia’s son arrived shortly after; a letter dated 22 March 1965 opens with “How is Peter Carson Stewart? Cuter than ever no doubt.” Two heartening letters between Fletcher Smith and Bruce Stewart, Marcia’s fiancé, discuss the purchase of Bruce’s engagement ring for Marcia.¹⁶ In this case, Fletcher’s letter is handwritten and the letterhead of the Finnish consulate is crossed out, a clear sign that he considered the subject a personal matter that just happened to be dealt with at his office.

The presence of personal letters among the correspondence of family businesses is a widespread phenomenon among the business fonds held at the Dalhousie University Archives. After materials of this nature are processed, files of personal correspondence are often found physically and intellectually located among business correspondence and the significant personal influence over the entire corporate body is concealed by the emphasis on administrative functions and activities. For example, the personal archives of William Duff, a former member of parliament and senator for Nova Scotia, exist among the archives of his Lunenburg Outfitting Company, which imported salt, molasses, and other goods into Nova Scotia. The company’s fonds also contains personal correspondence of Wilfred E. Knickle and other members of the Knickle family.¹⁷ The Oland family’s personal archives may have been separated from the business archives, but the Oland and Son Fonds still contains personal correspondence of senior executives who conducted personal business in their offices, including R.D. Mussett, Robert Merchant, and Norman Stanbury.¹⁸ It also contains the personal correspondence of *Bluenose II* crew members. Personal correspondence in the archives of corporate bodies is often mixed with deeds, estate papers, share certificates, and other “transactional” personal archives that exhibit the complex relationships embodied in the archives of family businesses in Nova Scotia and elsewhere. This raises difficult questions about the boundary of the fonds and the distinction between personal and corporate archives.

16 DUA, A.M. Smith and Company Fonds, MS-4-23, box 85, folder 46.

17 In 1943, the Lunenburg Outfitting Company was purchased by Adams and Knickle Limited, a major fishing and shipping outfit also based in Lunenburg. Interestingly, the archives of Adams and Knickle Limited contain few personal records of the Adams or Knickle family.

18 Stanbury married Bruce Oland’s sister, Amadita Diana Oland, in 1938 and eventually became a board member of Oland and Son. After the sale, he held positions with the family’s private investment and holdings companies. Materials from his personal “fonds,” such as minutes and correspondence of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, are split between the Oland and Son Fonds and the Oland Family Fonds.

On the Boundary of Fonds and the Principle of Provenance

It is easy to say that the Smith family letters belong with the corporate archives of A.M. Smith and Company because that is where they were created and kept, but such an approach is just one example of how the application of the principle of provenance through archival arrangement and description can obfuscate the personal role in the creation of complex aggregations of “corporate” archives and effectively hide personal archives within those aggregations. The principle of respect des fonds, considered by most archivists to be the external aspect of provenance, was articulated in 1841 by French archivist Natalis de Wailly, who held that “all documents which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual form a *fonds*, and must be kept together.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, more than 170 years later, many archivists still feel that personal archives have been “neglected” in archival theory, which has derived from this nineteenth-century perspective on provenance and the fonds.²⁰ Despite its practical shortcomings, the principle of respect des fonds has become so firmly engrained in archival thought that Michel Duchein declared in 1983 that “it is reasonable to think that [the principle] will never again be fundamentally questioned and that it constitutes a definitive fact of archival science.”²¹ The principle may still dominate archival thought, but the creation and accumulation of personal archives in corporate settings certainly raises questions about one of its fundamental assumptions: that personal archives are distinguishable from corporate archives.

This challenge is best illustrated in hierarchical finding aids that force archivists to document their struggle with what Heather MacNeil has called a “dilemma” in the “application of the concept of archival creator.”²² According to the *Rules for Archival Description*, the archival creator is “the person(s) or office(s) of origin of records, that is, the person, family (families), or corporate body (bodies) that created and/or accumulated and used records in the course

19 G. Desjardins, *Le Service des Archives départementales* (Paris: E. Bourloton, 1890), 30, quoted in Michel Duchein, “The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe,” *American Archivist* 55, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 19.

20 Riva Pollard provides a nice summary of the “plight of personal papers in the archival profession.” Riva A. Pollard, “The Appraisal of Personal Papers: A Critical Review,” *Archivaria* 52 (2001): 137–40. For a more recent summary of the theoretical discussion of personal archives, see Catherine Hobbs, “Reinvisioning the Personal: Reframing Traces of Individual Life,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 213–41.

21 Michel Duchein, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respect des Fonds in Archival Science,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 66.

22 Heather MacNeil, “The Context is All: Describing a Fonds and its Parts in Accordance with the Rules or Archival Description,” in *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice*, ed. Terry Eastwood (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 203.

of that creator's activities and functions."²³ This may be straightforward in most cases, but as Adrian Cunningham observes, "multiple provenance can also occur simultaneously, where more than one entity is simultaneously involved in the creation and use of a given body of records."²⁴ Cunningham is referring to changing administrative structures in a corporate body, but multiple provenance is also supported by the messy archival legacy of family businesses like A.M. Smith and Company, where the records provide ample evidence that physical spaces can serve personal and business interests and that human agents in corporate bodies often do not see their business records as fundamentally different from their personal archives. MacNeil writes that, in these "situations where the individual elements of archival creation are split," archivists are left to answer the questions of how each element should be weighted and "which element should be considered determinative in assigning responsibility for archival creation."²⁵ Fundamentally, the dilemma is about parsing the supposed distinction between personal archives and corporate archives while attempting to understand the provenance of the archives and the boundary of the fonds. Aggregations of personal archives and family business records often share the same provenance, but are they the same fonds? Laura Millar addresses this question and cautions that "provenance and the fonds are not the same, nor do they represent a constant, one-to-one relationship."²⁶ If there are in fact multiple fonds, however, keeping the materials together physically would violate another central tenet of the principle of respect des fonds: that fonds be kept physically and intellectually separate. Splitting the fonds, on the other hand, would tarnish the context of creation, accumulation, and use of records within each fonds. The messy alternative, which appears to be widespread in archival practice, is to keep personal archives mixed among corporate archives, call the aggregation a fonds, and attribute it to a corporate body, thereby shrouding the individuals and families that could, in fact, be said to have caused the entire body of records to be created.

In his survey of recent debates about archival description, Geoffrey Yeo comments that this hierarchical form of description is representative of a "monolithic view" of the fonds as a hierarchical physical entity "in which no file belongs to more than one series, and no series to more than one fonds or

23 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Rules for Archival Description*, rev. ed. (Ottawa, 2008), D-7.

24 Adrian Cunningham, "Harnessing the Power of Provenance in Archival Description: An Australian Perspective on the Development of the Second Edition of *ISAAR(CPF)*," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 1-2 (January 2008): 17.

25 MacNeil, "The Context is All," 203.

26 Laura Millar, "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Time and Space," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 5.

records group.”²⁷ Yeo observes that even the Australian “series system,” which abandons assumptions about hierarchical relationships between creators and records and provides “truer representations of provenance,” assumes that “series may have multiple contexts, but that items, files, and folders within a series have single, stable contexts and can be managed collectively using traditional hierarchical methods.”²⁸ Elsewhere, Yeo argues that archivists have established a false dichotomy between “organic” fonds and “artificial” collections, and notes that, “ultimately, any aggregation that results from conscious human action is an artificial creation.”²⁹ Calling the rigid distinctions unsupported, Yeo suggests that archivists are really parsing a “continuum” of aggregations with “innumerable intermediate gradations” between archival fonds and collections.³⁰ With so many scenarios that can lead to the mixing of personal archives with corporate archives, it is not unreasonable to wonder if there is a similar continuum for personal archives and the archives of corporate bodies. This suggests that archivists are really confronted with a matrix of archival origins, where fonds and collections are found on one continuum and individuals and corporate bodies on the other.

Barr’s criticism of the fonds is rooted in what she sees as the “inadequate” scope of the traditional definition of provenance and the reality that “respect for provenance requires more than respect for fonds” and respect for original order.³¹ In recent years, numerous archivists have begun to address the other aspects of provenance that must be respected during arrangement and description. These perspectives are summarized in a wide-ranging overview of the origins and evolution of the principle of provenance by Jennifer Douglas, who concludes that the principle has become “virtually indistinguishable from the notion of context” and that provenance is now viewed as “the umbrella under which an ever-expanding list of contextual factors are gathered.”³² A recurring theme in the literature is the fluid nature of provenance and the continual process of contextualization of records. Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar, for example, has written about the many narratives of archives and warns that we can no longer “regard the record as an artefact with fixed boundar-

27 Geoffrey Yeo, “Debates about Description,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 92–93.

28 *Ibid.*, 93–94.

29 Geoffrey Yeo, “The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection,” *Archivaria* 73 (Spring 2012): 52.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Debra Barr, “Protecting Provenance: Response to the Report of the Working Group on Description at the Fonds Level,” *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989): 141.

32 Jennifer Douglas, “Origins: Evolving Ideas about the Principle of Provenance,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 37.

ies of contents and contexts.”³³ Tom Nesmith also argues against viewing provenance as a fixed determination, writing that “there can be no final and full statement of what a given provenance is” because archival provenance is the “overall history of the record.”³⁴ Elsewhere, Nesmith has commented that archives are “ongoing human processes or activities” and that “any given archival record ... is animated by human interests, behaviour, and culture.”³⁵

These observations about the *process* of provenance seem particularly relevant to an aggregation of materials accumulated and used by Trevor Bebb, a local historian from Lockeport, Nova Scotia. Bebb collected the records of businesses and individuals from various locations around Lockeport and stored these materials in his home while he conducted his research on the shipping and mercantile activities of the region. His first donation to the Dalhousie University Archives was several metres of financial records created at a general store owned by William McMillan. Subsequent donations included materials from H. & A. Locke and W. & J. Harding, other family-owned local businesses active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until 2011, the Archives held three distinct business fonds that contained a marginal amount of intermingled personal archives, but then Bebb donated McMillan’s personal and business correspondence, more records of H. & A. Locke, personal letters of several seemingly unrelated individuals from the Lockeport area, and other records.

When the final donation came, it was clear that the Archives had been, albeit unknowingly, compiling a complex aggregation of materials related to the social and economic growth of Lockeport and surrounding areas. It would have been impractical to attempt to delineate McMillan’s correspondence from the rest of the materials donated in 2011, let alone try to identify a clear boundary between McMillan’s personal archives and his business records. Bebb even mixed his own personal archives with the collected materials, as evidenced in a file of nineteenth-century correspondence about the schooner *Springwood*, which also includes two letters sent to newspapers in the 1980s, photocopies made by Bebb, and a typed list of captains of the *Springwood*.³⁶ Leaving the three already established business fonds “outside” the aggregation acquired in 2011 would have been illogical and counterproductive for access and research purposes; the Archives is now resolved to bring earlier donations “into” the collection that Bebb curated over many years, which has been aptly

33 Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 138.

34 Tom Nesmith, “The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of 19th-century Aboriginal-European Relations in Western Canada,” *Archival Science* 6 (2006): 359.

35 Tom Nesmith, “Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 262.

36 DUA, Lockeport Historical Collection, MS-4-177, box 6, folder 19, correspondence about the schooner *Springwood*.

called the Lockport Historical Collection. The materials are a continually evolving aggregation of intermingled archives in the truest sense.

Archivists clearly need to find a way to ensure that personal archives are not “lost” among voluminous family business records. Given that work plays a central role in the mixing of personal archives with those of corporate bodies, it seems appropriate to examine these mixed aggregations from a work-centric hermeneutic perspective: the work identity of the creator(s). This approach will not provide practical solutions in and of itself, but it can help archivists create a more fulsome picture of intermingled aggregations of records and possibly guide arrangement and description decisions. Postmodern archival theory has established a theoretical foundation for such a framework by exposing the limitations of provenance and questioning the boundary of the fonds, but it does not adequately address the personal and social aspects of work that must be understood before materials of this nature can be arranged and described. Given the paucity of archival theory in this area, analysis of this concept must draw on literature from sociology and related disciplines.

Work Identity

Of the many dimensions of life that can affect personal identity (and, by extension, the nature of personal archives), work surely looms among the largest. There are many definitions of “work” and many more contexts in which people work. While some forms of work involve transactional relationships between individuals and corporate bodies, others are of a more personal nature. Business ethics professor Al Gini describes work as “any activity we need or want to do in order to achieve the basic requirements of life and/or to maintain a certain life-style.”³⁷ Gini gracefully bridges an expansive body of literature on work and labour, from Karl Marx’s argument that “the nature of individuals ... depends on the material conditions determining their production”³⁸ to German sociologist Max Weber’s notion of the “Protestant work ethic,”³⁹ which holds that work is a duty to self and society, and to contemporary sociological perspectives that postulate that capitalism has led this “ethical dimension” of work to be “eclipsed by an increasing preoccupation

37 Al Gini, “Work, Identity and Self: How We Are Formed by the Work We Do,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 17, no. 7 (May 1998): 708.

38 Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. Lloyd Easton and Kurt Guddot (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1967), 409.

39 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2001).

merely with the material fruits of labour.”⁴⁰ For Gini, work is so inescapable and perpetual that it resembles a Sisyphean task where we are “condemned to push and chase that thing we call our job, our career, our work of all days.”⁴¹ Work of all days is perhaps an understatement. Gini’s discussion is largely based on the reality that “we will not sleep as much, spend time with our families as much, eat as much or recreate and rest as much as we work.”⁴² He makes a strong argument that work cannot be “easily separated from the rest of our lives” and that our careers and identities are “equivalent,” but admits that other factors contribute to identity formation, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion.⁴³ British researchers John Kirk and Christine Wall also acknowledge these factors and comment that complex identity formations have been “historically significant in shaping work identities in Britain and the United States.”⁴⁴

Although identification with many of these constructs may be a “volitional process,” as Joel Wurl has suggested,⁴⁵ the vast majority of people will invariably develop some kind of work identity because work is not volitional; it is an “entirely non-discretionary matter,” as Gini has described.⁴⁶ Management professors Kate Walsh and Judith R. Gordon define this individual work identity as “a work-based self-concept, constituted of a combination of organizational, occupational, and other identities that shapes the roles a person adopts and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work.”⁴⁷ The concept is similar to the notion of job attitude, which management professors Timothy A. Judge and John D. Kammeyer-Mueller describe as “evaluations of one’s job that express one’s feelings toward, beliefs about, and attachment to one’s job.”⁴⁸ Of primary importance is the idea that individuals with “strong” work identities devote more time to their work than those with “weak” work identities, a personal attitude that, in the context of recordkeeping practices, seems to correlate to the degree of intermingling of

40 John Kirk and Christine Wall, *Work and Identity: Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 84–85.

41 Gini, “Work, Identity and Self,” 707.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 707–8.

44 Kirk and Wall, *Work and Identity*, 88.

45 Joel Wurl, “Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles for Documenting the Immigrant Experience,” *Archival Issues* 29, no. 1 (2005): 70.

46 Gini, “Work, Identity and Self,” 707.

47 Kate Walsh and Judith R. Gordon, “Creating an Individual Work Identity,” *Human Resource Management Review* 18, no. 1 (March 2008): 47.

48 Timothy A. Judge and John D. Kammeyer-Mueller, “Job Attitudes,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 63 (2012): 344.

personal and corporate archives.⁴⁹ A work identity can also change over time, and the identity may not be shared among family members.

Strong work identities are exhibited by families with family businesses that extend through multiple generations or by individuals who retain the records of businesses or organizations with which they strongly identify. Walsh and Gordon's definition of work identity is a useful concept that archivists can employ in their efforts to grapple with the archival creator dilemma. For archivists, individual work identity can be seen as a work-based self-concept constructed from a combination of organizational, occupational, family, and social identities that influence the manner in which a person or family creates, accumulates, and uses records and information. By providing a theoretical basis for archivists to consider the personal nature of corporate records and the tendencies that lead individuals to accumulate corporate records, work identity can help archivists gain deeper insight into the provenance of mixed aggregations of personal and corporate archives.

With an operational definition of work identity, archivists can begin to explore its potential for analyzing and interpreting intermingled archives. Much of the literature on work identity interrogates the supposed dualism between work and family, or work and personal life, and the degree to which such a distinction is supported by measurable human behaviour. Management professors Winkel and Clayton, for example, have explored the "permeability" and "flexibility" of "work and family domains" by focusing on the "daily micro transitions" people make between family and work, including "commuting, accepting a call from a spouse while at the office, or checking work-related emails while at home."⁵⁰ Clearly, they are examining the nature of work in modern organizational settings and not the lives of lumbermen, seamen, and other workers who may have spent days or weeks commuting to or from "work," but the underlying concepts do have relevance for archivists working with intermingled records from earlier time periods. Boundary permeability refers to the "degree a domain or role allows an individual to be physically located in the domain but psychologically engaged in another domain," and flexibility is the "degree to which an individual can be cognitively or behaviorally taken out of a domain to meet the needs of another domain."⁵¹

49 Jeffrey H. Greenhaus, Ann C. Peng, and Tammy D. Allen, "Relations of Work Identity, Family Identity, Situational Demands, and Sex with Employee Work Hours," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 80, no. 1 (February 2012): 27–37. Of course, the mixing of personal archives with corporate archives does occur in corporate bodies with individuals who possess "weak" work identities, but it is less likely than in environments with individuals who possess "strong" work identities, such as the offices of family businesses.

50 Doan E. Winkel and Russell W. Clayton, "Transitioning Between Work and Family Roles as a Function of Boundary Flexibility and Role Salience," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 76, no. 2 (April 2010): 336.

51 Winkel and Clayton, "Transitioning Between Work and Family Roles," 336–37.

Permeability and flexibility of work and family domains could be especially useful frameworks for interpreting unincorporated business operations such as the mercantile activities of the O'Brien family, nineteenth-century merchants from Wallace, Nova Scotia. Family correspondence illustrates the strong work identities of the family members and suggests that mercantile work has high permeability with family life. One letter from 1867 contains passages written by both of John O'Brien's parents.⁵² The passage from John's father, Joseph, refers to the family shipping business and recommends that John "advertise for sale or charter as soon as you arrive." However, the passage from John's mother, Janet, is much more personal and touches on family relations and deaths in the community. Janet acknowledges the "great storms of [the] sea" and writes, "My dear son I hope we will be spard [sic] to meet again." These records are, as might be expected, intermingled among vessel papers, bills of lading, receipts, and other records generated through business transactions involving the family's vessels. The contents of the fonds also suggest that when it comes to work environments such as ships, there is great flexibility between work and family life. Notes on the family prepared by the donor indicate that the barque *Eliza Oulton* was "the only home" of John and Susie O'Brien and "the birthplace of their only child, Elizabeth Olga, born while the vessel was in the harbor of Poti on the Black Sea, Russia in June, 1869."⁵³ John died of yellow fever the following year while the vessel was in the West Indies. This recognition of high permeability and flexibility between the family's business and personal life enables the business records to be seen from a more personal perspective and the personal archives to reveal the family's deep connections to work.

Attempting to incorporate work identities into archival practice carries some risks. Elisabeth Kaplan has warned that concepts such as ethnicity and identity "cannot be imposed anachronistically" or applied to past historical events.⁵⁴ Sociologist Karen Foster has observed that "many studies of work explore issues of identity and social affiliation," but recent research illustrates how "epistemological questions about identity are left in a black box."⁵⁵ Work identity also poses some interpretive challenges for archivists, who after all are not constructing sociological studies but reconstructing human actions based on evidence gleaned from archives and their provenance and custodial history. To understand how to arrange and describe personal archives found

52 DUA, O'Brien Family Fonds, MS-4-242, box 3, folder 9, Joseph and Janet O'Brien to John O'Brien, 19 June 1867.

53 DUA, O'Brien Family Fonds, MS-4-242, box 5, folder 27.

54 Elisabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity," *American Archivist* 63, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 129.

55 Karen Foster, "Work, Narrative Identity and Social Affiliation," *Work, Employment & Society* 26, no. 6 (December 2012): 936–37.

among family business records, one must understand how they became intermingled. During the process of what Yeo calls “retrospective description” of materials created decades ago, constructing a work identity of the creator(s) is essentially an act of *Verstehen*, or interpretative and participatory examination of social phenomena.⁵⁶ The concept of *Verstehen* was introduced by German historian Johann Gustav Droysen and developed by Max Weber. Social anthropologist Roy Dilley describes *Verstehen* as a process in which the interpreter must “rethink or inwardly re-live the actions of historical agents ... with a view to rendering intelligible their behaviour and the products of human endeavour.”⁵⁷ Dilley would likely characterize archival contextualization as an appeal to “features and characteristics surrounding a phenomenon in order to illuminate it and understand or give sense to it.”⁵⁸

Dilley and his colleagues fully recognize the challenges associated with this type of contextualization. Author Sándor G.J. Hervey’s observation that “context often seems to be a means of explaining the unexplained by the inexplicable” is especially prescient.⁵⁹ Perhaps, then, it is not surprising to observe that archivists have embraced context in a relatively superficial sense and have largely avoided the power to interpret and represent. For example, archivist Heather Beattie describes aspects of an “expanded” provenance of women’s diaries and notes that whereas “academics in disciplines such as literature, psychology, and gender and cultural studies ... often provide a much fuller picture of the context of the diary’s creation ... in archival description today this expanded version of a diary’s provenance is rarely provided.”⁶⁰ These scholars address “aspects of the diary’s provenance that are rarely mentioned in archival description: the diarist’s motivation for writing, the intended audience, the implications of the diary’s custodial history, and the role of the archivist in its representation.”⁶¹ Not only are such scholars interrogating the identities and social relationships of the author, they are also “interpreting the interpreters,” as media and film studies professor Mark Hobart might say. In this case, these interpreters are the archivists who only reluctantly take on this role and its inherent “power to describe and control contexts.”⁶²

56 Yeo, “Debates about Description,” 94–96.

57 Roy Dilley, “Introduction: The Problem of Context,” in *The Problem of Context*, ed. Roy Dilley (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 23.

58 *Ibid.*, 1.

59 Sándor G.J. Hervey, “Context, the Ghost in the Machine,” in *The Problem of Context*, ed. Roy Dilley (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 68–69.

60 Heather Beattie, “Where Narratives Meet: Archival Description, Provenance, and Women’s Diaries,” *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (2009): 86.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Mark Hobart, “As They Like It: Overinterpretation and Hyporeality in Bali,” in *The Problem of Context*, ed. Roy Dilley, *Methodology & History in Anthropology* 4 (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 117; Dilley, “The Problem of Context,” 31.

Sensitive to this need to interpret the “amorphous and changing” intentions of the creators of personal archives, Catherine Hobbs argues that a renewed focus on the experience of individuals rather than the evidence and information of their personal archives would allow personal archives to be “steeped in the interpretation and choices of their creators” and to emphasize “the subtle and changing relationship of people to their archives and of those archives to human life.”⁶³ This focus on the experience of individuals could quite naturally emphasize their relationship to work and, ultimately, to records created by corporate bodies with which they have been associated. Hobbs’s imperative, however, is to “avoid the direct parallel to organizational records,” and her notion that personal archives “emerge from life experience and circumstances” is based in part on the assumption that they are “controlled entirely by private individuals before they enter a repository” and that “the creation of the personal archives occurs outside of an administrative framework.” The widespread presence of personal archives among the records of corporate bodies, however, challenges these assumptions and undermines Hobbs’s suggestion that the intentions of the creator of personal archives are “key to understanding the evolutions of the documentation in a way that is not applicable to organizational records.”⁶⁴ On the contrary, materials of this nature suggest that archivists would benefit from considering the intentions and experiences of the individuals when arranging and describing family business records, even if the entire aggregation is attributed to a corporate body and viewed, on the whole, as evidence of administrative functions and activities. This would allow for the proper contextualization of personal archives found among family business records by imbuing the administrative records with the same emphasis on the “character and interiority of the individual” that Hobbs argues is key to understanding personal archives.⁶⁵ It is, after all, the individual who caused the family business to be established and the administrative records to be created. The work identity of individuals and families is therefore crucial to understanding how the archives of a family business are “linked to and part of [the] experience of the creators.”⁶⁶

Conclusion

At the root of MacNeil’s archival creator dilemma is the close relationship between personal life and work life. Archivists have historically tried to demarcate these spaces through the application of the concept of respect des fonds to the point that corporate bodies have, in effect, been construed as

63 Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 213, 222–26.

64 *Ibid.*, 225.

65 *Ibid.*, 220.

66 *Ibid.*, 226.

fundamentally similar to persons and families. However, examples such as the A.M. Smith and Company Fonds, in which personal archives can be found among the records of a family-owned salt fish business, illustrate that rigid distinctions between personal archives and the archives of corporate bodies are not supported by archival evidence. Yeo has exposed the dichotomy of the “organic” fonds versus the “artificial” collection as a theoretical fallacy unsupported by existing “organic” aggregations that appear to be somewhere in between a fonds and a collection. Mixed aggregations of personal archives and family business records like those found in Nova Scotia suggest that this fallacy also extends to the rigid distinctions between personal archives and corporate archives. Recognition of the seemingly infinite array of relationships between individuals, families, and corporate bodies will enable archivists to begin constructing a theoretical and practical framework that allows for multiple creators and other multi-dimensional qualities of complex aggregations to be fully explained. Above all else, when arranging and describing aggregations of family business records that contain personal archives, archivists must consider the administrative functions and activities of the business as well as the personal intentions and work identities of the individuals who ultimately led to the creation, accumulation, and use of the entire body of records.

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