ARCHIVAL
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF MARK A. GREENE
VALUES

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ON RESPONSIBLE CUSTODY

Archivists ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. As responsible stewards, archivists are committed to making reasonable and defensible choices for the holdings of their institutions. They strive to balance the sometimes competing interests of various stakeholders. Archivists are judicious stewards who manage records by following best practices in developing facilities service standards, collection development policies, user service benchmarks, and other performance metrics. They collaborate with external partners for the benefit of users and public needs. In certain situations, archivists recognize the need to deaccession materials so that resources can be strategically applied to the most essential or useful materials.

— SAA CORE VALUE

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FROM RESPONSIBLE CUSTODY TO RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

MICHELLE LIGHT

In his presidential address at the August 2008 Society of American Archivists (SAA) Annual Meeting, Mark Greene enumerated ten archival values: professionalism, collectivity, activism, selection, preservation, democracy, service, diversity, use and access, and history. He did not include the concept of responsible custody. Inspired by Greene's address, SAA Council charged a task force to develop a statement of "Core Values of Archivists" in February.[1] In February 2010, the task force reported that it reviewed and ranked Mark Greene's values along with value statements from several related professional organizations.[2] In May 2010, the task force submitted an early draft to Council for discussion. Responsible custody was not represented in this draft either. The draft included access and use, accountability, advocacy, diversity, history and memory, preservation, professionalism, selection, service, and social responsibility.[3] After discussing the submitted draft, Council "suggested adding language to the draft on the importance of stewardship."[4]

In August 2010, the task force presented a second draft to Council that included responsible custody.[5] Council approved this draft and asked the group to gather member feedback about it. In March 2011 over email, the group presented Council with a revised draft that incorporated suggestions from a variety of sources. Concerns were expressed that "Task Force revisions significantly changed the understanding, tone, and context of the August 2010 draft," so Council tabled discussion until the May 2011 meeting.[6] For this meeting, Council member Scott Cline drafted a new revision. Council suggested minor revisions and adopted the statement.[7] The wording for the Responsible Custody value was edited but remained similar in spirit.

After reviewing this history, I became curious about why the core values included the concept of *custody* when archival thinking has challenged the concept for decades. Custody seemed like a remarkably old-fashioned value for 2011. As the introduction to the core values states, values are supposed to "embody what a profession stands for and should form the basis for the behavior of its members."[8] Council intended for the values to be "core beliefs that are not expected to change over time."[9] In this essay, I will review archival literature to show how the concept of *custody*, as articulated in this value, has evolved over the past few decades. I argue that the value should be revised to account for an increasing variety of approaches that archivists use to safeguard and steward archival materials for present and future stakeholders. Beginning with F. Gerald Ham's seminal 1981 article "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," I will highlight postcustodial debates in the electronic records environment, advocacy for cultural sensitivity in native or colonial archives, and new models for stewardship associated with the community archives movement. This review will demonstrate the need to bring this value more in line with an increasingly digital environment and pluralistic society. I suggest that the value be revised as "responsible stewardship," or even "respectful stewardship." By introducing a commitment to people in this value— whether donors, members of a documented community, users, or other stakeholders— the value can better accommodate the participation of groups or communities in the long-term care of their archives, rather than focusing on management or ownership of an institution's holdings.

Looking back through human history, the physical custody of records has long been associated with archives as well as with the power to assert control over communities through the rights or evidence represented within the records.[10] Custody has also been associated with our identity as archivists. Terry Cook summarizes this professional mentality: "Archivists are the 'keepers.' We look after records placed under our care. We rescue things when no one else needs them. We lovingly restore and conserve them. We preserve them in our vaults forever."[11]

This imagery goes back centuries. Ernst Posner, for example, cites archaeological evidence from 2100 BCE of Assyrians collecting tablets and housing them together in single locations.[12] T. R. Schellenberg opens his *Modern Archives* manual with the sixth-century Roman emperor Justinian's call for establishing archives and appointing individuals responsible for their custody and protection: "Let . . . a public building be allocated, in which building the magistrate (defensor) is to store the records, choosing someone to have custody over them so that they remain uncorrupted and may be found quickly by those requiring them, and let there be among them an archives. . . ."[13] Luciana Duranti also summarized the Western history of archives as sacrosanct places for creating and preserving trustworthy evidence. In Duranti's model, when records cross the threshold into archival custody, they are endowed with "trustworthiness" and gain the "capacity of serving as evidence and continuing memory of action."[14] Archival custody helps ensure authenticity and carries with it the responsibility to preserve this authenticity over time.[15] Archival custody guarantees a "neutral third party" accountable for securing records from tampering or degradation.[16]

Responsible custody appears prominently as a core value in Hilary Jenkinson's *A Manual of Archive Administration* published in 1922. For Jenkinson, the quality of an archives, that is its impartiality and authenticity, depends on proving that an archives has an "unbroken chain of custody" or an "unblemished line of responsible custodians."[17] A responsible custodian's first and most important duty is to "take all possible precautions for the safeguarding of his Archives and for their custody."[18] Ideally, a responsible custodian might be the original custodian of an archives connected with the administrative function that created them, or a successor custodian who legitimately inherited the archives, perhaps a different administrative authority or a public records office staffed by archivists. Legitimate, legal, physical, continuous, and guarded custody are all necessary attributes. Those archives without a legitimate heir, where an archivist might "go out of his way and intervene uninvited to save the life and character of the Archives,"[19] occupy a lesser status. Even though the line of custody might be blemished, "merely to save Archives so important for local history by offering them an asylum is a work of piety and usefulness."[20] However, these documents may not merit the status of an archives because of the circumstances of their custody.

Jenkinson also outlines required activities for "proper custody." Responsible custodians must defend the archives against two chief types of danger: "physical and moral."[21] To guard against physical danger, responsible custodians must safeguard storage buildings from environmental hazards, provide suitable storage conditions, protect archives from unauthorized access or theft, and treat materials skillfully so as not to damage them. To guard against moral dangers, archivists must supervise access to archives, guard against marking or altering documents, maintain original order, and use best practices for arrangement and description. SAA's Responsible Custody value is clearly inspired by Jenkinson.

In the United States context three decades after Jenkinson's publication, T. K. Schellenberg rejected Jenkinson's emphasis on unbroken custody as a defining feature of legitimate archives, noting that "modern records are large in volume, complex in origins, and frequently haphazard in their development."[22] Schellenberg bases the quality of records on preserving their integrity and evidentiary value. But Schellenberg also emphasizes an "archivist's custodial responsibilities." To "discharge his duties effectively," an archivist must have legal and physical custody over the records. Schellenberg focuses mostly on public records, so he was careful to distinguish "public ownership" of the records from the custody necessary to care for them.[23] Nevertheless, he emphasizes that legal and physical custody gives an archivist the "rights and privileges" to reproduce and authenticate copies, and to arrange, describe, and publish records to make them accessible for use. He quotes Waldo Leland: "Nothing but vexatious friction can come of any arrangement that permits the legal custody of archives to remain with those who no longer possess them."[24] Lack of physical and legal custody impedes the work of an archivist to manage archives.

For those who work in collecting repositories, best practice today is still to gain physical and legal custody of archives to facilitate their long-term management. SAA's 2013 "Guide to Deeds of Gifts" explains: "Repositories prefer to accept materials

through transfer of ownership. The cost of storing, preserving, and making collections available for research is so high that repositories generally can afford to do so only for materials they own."[25] Securing rights becomes especially important for reproductions, digitization, and other forms of subsequent distribution and publication. The differences between custody and ownership, and their relationship to property, may vary in different contexts, depending on the nature of the archival records, the holding institution, relevant laws, any agreements in place, and other stakeholders. But, abstractly, owning an archives or other form of property, or holding physical and legal custody over an archives or other property, entitles the holder to a bundle of rights— the right to use the archives freely, the right to exclude others from using it, and the right to manage, sell, give, or abandon it.[26]

The life-cycle model of records, employed by United States National Archives and Records Administration and others in the United States, neatly takes advantage of this model to control the use, access to, and fate of an archives after the creator transfers materials to archival custody or ownership. In the life-cycle model, records follow a linear progression, from creation, to maintenance and use, to disposition. If records have historical value after their active use, they are transferred to archival custody. Once in archival custody, creators cede their stake and claims, so archivists can arrange, describe, preserve, reproduce, and provide access to the archives as they find appropriate and without undue impediment.

In the past few decades, however, several challenges have arisen to the assumption that custody at the end of the record life cycle is an essential foundation for archival programs. In 1981, Gerald Ham called for postcustodial strategies to deal with new technologies and increasing masses of records. He believes that our "custodial ethos also has made us excessively proprietary toward our holdings" and "preoccupied with our own gardens."[27] For Ham, custody is a concept that undermines our responsibilities as archivists: "Our perception of ourselves as custodians has now become a deterrent to the effective management of the national record."[28] He offers two strategies in this postcustodial environment: interinstitutional cooperation and outreach. He called on archival repositories to assume a more dynamic, service-oriented role, "to act not only as custodians for records, but also to facilitate and coordinate inter-institutional activities and to provide services for less developed programs."[29] Concerned with the proliferation of small, underresourced institutions that collect and manage records with little planning, he encourages "archival service centers" to offer "traditional services in a new cooperative setting," including purchasing archival supplies, conservation or microfilming, appraising or surveying records, or processing collections.[30] He calls on archival service centers to change their core missions to offer this service-oriented leadership, rather than focusing exclusively on holdings in their custody. He also recognizes potential issues when one partner has more or less resources than the other, so he warns archival service centers to approach partnerships with truly cooperative intentions and not become "self-serving nor paternalistic."[31] He also sees great potential in the ability of historical records advisory boards to coordinate planning and action among many types of institutions in a region.[32]

While the current SAA core value of Responsible Custody encourages archivists to "collaborate with external partners," it focuses archivists' activities on ensuring "proper custody" for the archives "entrusted to them" and "the holdings of their institutions." This value does not provide much room for Ham's more service-oriented approach, where archivists of mainstream institutions might help other institutions or apply their expertise to archives outside their custody, perhaps as consultants, facilitators, collaborators, or resource coordinators. SAA's core value of Service fits Ham's approach better, as it allows archivists to "provide effective and efficient connections to (and mediation for) primary sources so that users, whoever they may be, can discover and benefit from the archival record of society, its institutions, and individuals."[33] However, the Service value seems to emphasize access or reference services, rather than ensuring the "future of the historical record" in Ham's vision, with archivists leading the way to collaborate in planning and managing a multilevel, cooperative archival program.

Following the publication of Ham's article, postcustodial approaches gained more traction as archivists faced increasing volumes of electronic records, not only because they no longer managed exclusively physical items, but also because of the multifaceted difficulties of assuming permanent custody of electronic records created in a variety of technological and sociopolitical contexts. Terry Cook summarizes the postcustodial approach as moving from archives to archiving. Rather than focusing on "physical things under our institutional custody," archives would serve as "access hubs" or auditing centers for records left in place in their original systems.[34] Terry Cook calls on archivists to broaden their understanding of how they use the archival principle of provenance in the long-term management of records and to engage more with "the conceptual context, business processes, and functional purpose" behind the creation of records. Rather than waiting to receive archival records at the end of their life cycles, he encourages archivists to work with records creators to design information systems that capture and preserve records from the most important functions, transactions, or activities.[35] In this way, archivists could ensure "corporate accountability, business process integrity, legal concerns, policy continuity, and operating memory are protected" without having to take custody of the records.[36] In Cook's vision, archivists still function as guardians of evidence, but in a conceptual, process-oriented framework, rather than in a physical, product-oriented one.[37]

The Australian records continuum approach reflects this way of thinking. In an electronic environment, Frank Upward explains that the purpose of an archival institution is to "identify and establish functional requirements for recordkeeping" that will enable the authentication of a record. Archivists are accountable for ensuring the continuity of records and their role as "trace, evidence and memory." Rather than archivists ensuring authentic records after they cross into archival custody, the "objectivity, understandability, availability, and usability of records need to be inherent in the way that the record is captured." Upward argues that the records continuum model conceptualizes recordkeeping so that the essential role of archives, especially its authentication function, can still be asserted in the virtual world when "the location of the resources and services will be of no concern."[38] With this shift in an

archivist's responsibility, custody would be irrelevant for the identification, control, and accessibility of records over time or for the fulfillment of the archival imperative.

Cal Lee and Helen Tibbo developed a complementary approach with their DigCCurr Matrix of Digital Curation Knowledge and Skills. They outline the emergence of the phrase "digital curation" as a "set of opportunities for cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary engagement" for caring for digital materials over their life cycles and into the future to support continuing reuse.[39] Digital curation addresses the complexities of digital preservation, especially the technical challenges (e.g., bit rot, technological dependencies, technological obsolescence, etc.), along with other dimensions, including the need for archivists to have the expertise, resources, mandates, policies, procedures, standards, and collaborative relationships to sustain this work over time. Lee and Tibbo consciously developed the DigCCurr Matrix "to reflect a post-custodial perspective." They explain, "Fixing the archival gaze solely on what happens within the walls of repositories runs the risk of neglecting other essential aspects of the archival enterprise, including engagement with creators and users of records, advocating for archival priorities, influencing policies, and exploring connections across a diversity of collections."[40]

The DigCCurr Matrix includes six dimensions of skills and knowledge for building a curriculum for digital curation, but two dimensions in particular are relevant to the value of responsible custody. Their first dimension is "Mandates, Values, and Principles," which "should serve as the basis for criteria to evaluate whether the digital curation activities have been carried out responsibly and appropriately."[41] It lists and further defines these as abstraction, accountability, adaptability, authenticity, automation, chain of custody, collection, context, continuum approach, critical inquiry, diversity, encapsulation, evidence, "informatting," interoperability, long term, modularity, open architecture, organizational learning, provenance, robustness, scale and scalability, significant properties, stakeholders, standardization, sustainability, and trust.[42] A responsible digital curator understands, attends to, or recognizes the value of all these. While some are common to the archival enterprise, others come from the field of information technology and can be specific to the nature of digital objects. When compared to a responsible custodian, a responsible curator has a set of concerns beyond items in custody.

Lee and Tibbo also address custody in their sixth dimension, Transition Points in the Information Continuum. Transition points are essentially the moments when digital resources transition from one environment or circumstance to another (e.g., from an active use environment to a secondary use environment) and where professional and ethical decisions are usually necessary (e.g., Should metadata be generated? Should use be logged? Who should have permission to access? etc.). Archival custody is one transition point, but not a mandatory one. "Custody is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for successful digital curation."[43]

Even within a more traditional analog framework, archivists question whether custody is necessary for them to be of service or value in ensuring the survival of a diverse historical record. In 1970, Howard Zinn spoke at the SAA Annual Meeting and

challenged archivists to "take the trouble to compile a whole new world of documentary material, about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people."[44] He lamented that our collections of "records, papers, and memoirs, as well as oral history, is biased towards the important and powerful people of the society, tending to ignore the impotent and obscure."[45] For several decades afterward, archivists have actively sought to document underdocumented, minority, and ethnic communities to help preserve their legacies and diversify the historical record. However, troubling questions remain about power dynamics when mainstream institutions, represented largely by educated white individuals with practices rooted in Western thought, remove archival documentation from communities with the assumption that mainstream institutions offer superior custodial environments and practices that will ensure the longevity and the wider use of these archives. As Rabia Gibbs asks, "When is it legitimate to remove materials in the interest of access and preservation? Do materials that develop a broader regional or national scope of social significance automatically move into a broader scope of ownership?"[46]

Joel Wurl offers an answer based on his experience working with immigrant archives. He argues that "custodianship needs to be replaced by stewardship."[47] With the custodial approach, when archives are relinquished to a collecting institution, the institution begins to care more about the importance of the archives to potential users than to the originators of the archives. Wurl's stewardship approach describes a different relationship between the originator and the collecting institution, one that promulgates an ongoing partnership. He explains, "In a stewardship approach, archival material is viewed less as property and more as cultural asset, jointly held and invested in by the archive and the community of origin."[48] An individual or group may give their archives to the collecting repository, but the relationship is just beginning, not ending, with the transfer of materials. Archivists have a responsibility to forge lasting relationships with people and communities so they can share in the investment and decision-making involved in caring for their archives. Similar to the postcustodial approach for electronic records, for Wurl, building strong, collaborative relationships with records creators throughout and beyond the records life cycle is essential for managing archives effectively. In contrast, the current Responsible Custody value does not privilege a relationship with the community of origin; it is part of "various stakeholders" who might have "competing interests" at odds with others and those of the repository.

In April 2006, a group of Native American and non-native American archivists, librarians, museum curators, historians, and anthropologists developed the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. The protocols bring into sharp relief how Western archival principles and practices, especially those centering around ownership and access, are sometimes at odds with the culturally respectful care of native materials in the custody of non-native repositories.[49] The protocols emphasize the need for repositories to build cooperative relationships with tribal representatives, consult them on a wide range of issues, and forge "new models for shared stewardship." They emphasize that traditional knowledge systems "possess equal integrity and validity" and that policies for preservation, access, and use based on traditional approaches should

be respected. This might mean that, after consultation and dialogue with native tribes, repositories return or restrict culturally sensitive or sacred materials. Repositories might also work closely with tribes to better understand how materials should be organized and described in culturally appropriate and respectful ways, and deprecate Western arrangement and description practices when they differ. The protocols ask for more negotiable, culturally respectful practices in the care and custody of native materials and archives about Native Americans. SAA's Responsible Custody value, written four years later, is not entirely compatible with the protocols. Whereas the protocols place respect for native tribes first, the Responsible Custody value puts proper care of the records, as defined by the archivist, first. The value describes archivists balancing stakeholder interests with the repository's interests, the use of best practices, and other factors in determining how to "ensure proper custody" of archives.

In August 2007, the Native American Roundtable requested that SAA Council endorse the protocols. Council charged a task force to solicit feedback from SAA members about the protocols and to prepare a report about how Council should respond. The task force presented a summary of comments in support of and in opposition to the protocols to Council in February 2008.[50] Jennifer R. O'Neal characterizes the opposition as a "resistance to limiting access to already available collections based upon specific beliefs, requests, and needs of a Native American community; limiting universal access; opposition to the physical return or repatriation of materials already deemed historically and culturally valuable from a Western perspective; and fears that a consultative model for management of collections would be complicated, prohibitive, and lengthy."[51] Council declined to endorse the protocols, but acknowledged that "in a pluralistic society, there is a need for ongoing dialog regarding matters of cultural sensitivity among archivists, stakeholders, and the many and varied cultures represented within archival repositories."[52] For O'Neal, the protocols highlight the need for archivists to stop perpetuating a one-sided Western approach and embrace multiple perspectives and approaches for understanding and preserving the past—to "promote respectful and collaborative stewardship."[53]

Even though SAA did not endorse the protocols, Elizabeth Joffrion and Natalia Fernández found they still have an impact on professional practice. From surveys, they conclude that the protocols paved the way for improved relationships between tribes and repositories managing tribal content. Survey respondents actively sought the perspective of tribal communities in the selection, arrangement, description, and preservation of materials. Respondents reported various strategies for engaging tribal members in sharing their expertise. Most were open to providing special treatment for culturally sensitive materials, including allowing tribes to identify that content, restricting access to the content, or removing it from a physical or online collection.[54] Joffrion and Fernandez conclude that the protocols provide a useful framework for building collaborative relationships with a community based on mutual respect and trust. Once seen as challenging the core principles of Western archives, the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* reflects a direction toward which our values must evolve if archivists aspire "to document and preserve the record of the broadest possible

range of individuals, socio-economic groups, governance, and corporate entities in society."[55]

Whether in the case of Native American materials or formerly colonized countries around the world, archives from and about native peoples have often remained in the custody or under the control of an institution linked to a formerly dominant power or oppressor. This can perpetuate historically unequal or unjust power relationships. Jeannette Bastian argues that when custodial claims compete, such as in the case of former colonies or collapsed regimes, postcustodial management practices can help archives support the basic human right to access one's own history.[56] Even though physical and legal custody may protect the evidential value of such records, custody becomes problematic when it conflicts with an equally important obligation to ensure a community has equitable access to its collective memory. As a solution, Bastian proposes duplicating archives or creating online, virtual collocations of the collections to mediate access between competing claims.[57] When considering collaborative digitization projects between Western nations and Africa, Michele Pickering asks, "How do we share knowledge without being exploited? How do we enter into partnerships with countries in the North in ways that address but do not reinforce the digital divide? How do we ensure that such partnerships do not merely reformulate issues of heritage plundering and cultural asset-stripping?"[58] Even when mainstream institutions have the best intentions for collaborative projects that expand access to materials in their custody, custody itself can remain a problem. Jarrett Drake, reflecting on his work in building a community archives about police violence against African Americans in Cleveland, explains, "It's important that we don't re-traumatize communities or expose them for more white gaze, exploitation, and plunder."[59] Rather than collecting documentation about black and brown lives for custody in traditional archival repositories, Drake advocates for professional archivists to support the creation of more community-based archives. To transform archiving into a more inclusive process, he states that "the terms on which we partner, collaborate, and act must be rooted in questioning, disruption and decolonization, lest we replicate the oppression currently reflected in traditional archival repositories."

The call to treat archival materials of historically marginalized or oppressed communities in more respectful, culturally sensitive ways aligns closely with what Terry Cook describes as a new archival paradigm of community archiving. Community archiving represents a shift "from exclusive custodianship and ownership of archives to shared stewardship and collaboration."[60] In this new paradigm, archivists act as "mentors, facilitators, coaches" for communities in a participatory process of memory-making. Archivists partner directly with communities to provide professional archival expertise, and sometimes archival digital infrastructures, but archivists also learn from communities about their methods for telling stories, keeping memories, authenticating their collective pasts, and tracking relationships. Empowering communities to take care of their own records, in their own spaces, should support "society's interests in having expanded, vibrant, usable, and contextualized records for memory and identity."[61]

Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd studied a broad range of

practice for community archives, with many options between those who delegate custody to mainstream repositories and those who demand complete autonomy. Flinn et al. found that minority communities usually set up community archives as alternatives to mainstream repositories because "a community's custody over its archives and cultural heritage means power over what is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed, how it is to be described and on what terms it is to be accessed."[62] They argue that by rethinking traditional archival approaches to custody and exploring different kinds of relationships with groups, archivists could better fulfill their societal responsibilities to build "a more inclusive historical narrative"[63] and "diversify and transform collections and narratives."[64]

In a follow-up work, Andrew Flinn offers more advice. He encourages archivists to care for records outside of "the walls of their own repository" and help groups, communities, and individuals "care for their collections in the context in which they were created and collected." Jenkinson probably would have approved of his suggestion that archivists help the original custodians preserve their materials in their original places.[65] However, Flinn advocates for a "more participatory approach where different methods of custody and management, and different views of archival practice, and of collection and value are considered and embraced." Professional archivists might help train amateurs and volunteers to do preservation, processing, or reference work, while striving for the records to remain in the care and under the control of the community. He believes "some collections will, for some part of their life at least, be best understood if kept within the context of the community which created them," not in the custody of a mainstream repository.[66]

How can archivists figure out what kind of partnership might be best for a community, individual, or group? Anne Gilliland developed a culturally sensitive approach. The Voice, Identity, and Activism Framework helps archivists better understand the dynamics of memory-, record-, and archives-creation in different communities and contexts. The framework is "community-centric" in that it positions archivists to evaluate a community's archives from the community's perspective, not from the perspective of the repository, the records, or archival standards. Unlike the current Responsible Custody value, it holds archivists accountable for looking out for the best interests of a community in the care of their materials.[67]

The framework first encourages archivists to ask about a community's motivations for keeping archives. Does it want to promote its narratives and have more of a voice? Does it want to use archives to resolve conflicts, heal from trauma, make claims, restore rights, or establish new identities? The framework outlines ways to evaluate the nature of a community and its relationship to memory and recordkeeping. What emotions are present, like distrust, exclusivity, grief, guilt, hope, resilience, shame, or fear? Does the community want to forget or conceal its story from outsiders, or does it fear exposure, obliteration, or loss? How do generations relate to each other? Are community demographics changing; are there shifts in identity, assimilation, or dispersion? What are the protocols for transmitting knowledge and stories, or for handling sensitive or sacred materials? What records exist about the community versus

records created within the community, and who controls those? How has memory been recorded and transmitted; what value is ascribed to these records? Finally, what policy considerations should be brought to bear on the archives? Are best practices in place for caring for the archives? What is the ownership status of the records, or how does the community understand or perceive ownership? How can the community have equal voice in decisions about the records? Do preservation, description, and access to the archives accord with community custom or best serve the needs of the community? Are there circumstances when mainstream archives are the best option?[68]

As archivists work with representatives of marginalized and diverse communities—empowering them to maintain their own archives in sustainable ways or inviting them to share in decision-making over archival processes in our repositories—how should archivists handle competing stakeholders' claims? Michelle Caswell argues that, with shared stewardship models, archivists' foremost responsibility is to the community where the records originate, over the interests of donors, governing boards, and others.[69] In the case of records concerning human rights abuses, she argues that survivors should retain control over decision-making processes for appraisal, description, digitization, and access.

Mark Greene expresses his discomfort, however, for privileging one community's perspective over another. Explaining his difficulties with the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, he writes, "The document seems to demand a cultural hegemony by indigenous people at least as objectionable as the hegemony once exercised by European-descended archivists."[70] But, he forcefully argues that archivists must do a better job diversifying the historical record. He concludes that "we must seek a middle way of achieving multiculturalism between complete cultural hegemony by large, mainstream repositories and infinite dispersion of documentation among innumerable, often underresourced community archives."[71] He voices concerns about the proliferation of community archives, "which are far too often located in rented space, staffed solely by volunteers, open for uncertain hours, and equipped with dubious at best storage conditions."[72] In the dystopian extreme, the archival record might be divided up and controlled by a "group, sub-group, or sub-subgroup that asserts cultural authority to the materials" but does not have the resources (or inclination) to provide equitable access or proper storage.[73] However, he also recognizes that mainstream repositories "may be perceived as conquering and subjugating minority history" and asks, "How do we avoid treating African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, gays, and others as subjects of history rather than as creators and owners of their own history"?[74] He offers a seven-step plan for a middle way:

1. Reconsider "traditions" and invite "community conversation about acquisition priorities, descriptive practices, and access policies."
2. Consider the value of nontraditional collections for the evidence they contain.
3. "Seriously discuss the question of who does and should own/or control archival materials."
4. "Assist community archives and archivists to do their jobs better."
5. Collect multicultural materials actively.

6. "Engage with diverse communities in a multiplicity of ways."
7. Increase diversity in the profession.[75]

Mark Greene's middle way, appropriately enough, inspired me to suggest revisions to SAA's Responsible Custody value so that it might better guide archivists in making choices in different settings and circumstances. A middle way might forge a common path for archivists no matter where they work—in government agencies, academic institutions, religious institutions, corporate settings, historical societies, community archives, public libraries, and the like—or whether they work with digital and/or analog records. A middle way might accommodate a variety of approaches, including those who employ traditional custodial practices; offer postcustodial services; or support community archives.

One might argue that some person or organization will ultimately have physical custody or virtual responsibility for safeguarding an archives, whether in a mainstream repository or not. If not a mainstream repository, the Responsible Custody value might speak to those nonarchivists with responsibilities for maintaining the safety and integrity of the archives over time. SAA's core values, however, are for archivists, and several authors argue effectively that focusing archivists' attention only on the materials for which their repositories have custody makes archivists less effective at fulfilling a more expansive function to ensure the survival of and continuing access to evidence of a diverse range of human experience.

A few common threads run throughout the literature, whether the focus is on postcustodial approaches in an electronic records environment or on support for community archives in diverse populations. Authors encourage active engagement with communities—records creators, users, communities with claims or ties to the records, or other stakeholders. This engagement looks past a repository's holdings to build long-lasting relationships based on trust, respect, and sensitivity to local contexts. Whether for corporate or community archivists, postcustodial approaches encourage archivists to consider the cultures, systems, attributes, and environments to which archives belong as they weigh solutions and invite participation in decision-making. Authors also emphasize service over custody in describing an archivist's purpose and responsibilities. Archivists might also be auditors, educators, mentors, advisors, facilitators, partners, strategists, or coordinators.

In revising the value, I suggest, as others have before me, replacing "custody" with "stewardship." *Merriam-Webster* defines stewardship as "the activity or job of protecting and being responsible for something" or "the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care."[76] Stewardship is based on trust. It might narrowly convey the trust that a donor or community has in archivists' responsibility for managing records in their care, or it might more broadly convey the societal obligations archivists have to preserve evidence of human experience.

Stewardship also focuses on responsible management—making good decisions and using resources wisely. The Responsible Custody value captures this, but should be

reoriented to look beyond records in custody. The value currently describes how archivists "make reasonable and defensible choices for the holdings" and "balance the sometimes competing interests of various stakeholders." With postcustodial thinking, archivists must make careful decisions about priorities and resources for services that might support archives and interests *outside* of their institutions' holdings. With postcustodial approaches, interaction with stakeholders will increase, as should archivists' receptivity to their needs and suggestions. Given the variety of potential situations, negotiations and compromises are a must if archivists are to remain respectful and sensitive to local contexts, while considering their institutions' missions and resources, their obligations to users and the historical record, and professional ethics and best practices. Striving toward sustainability is important both for archivists in their home institutions and for the groups they support. Sustainability, or the ability to commit to servicing archives long-term, includes aspects of organizational health, procedural accountability, and fiscal responsibility. The value should represent these aspects of good management.

The current value states that archivists "manage records by following best practices in developing facilities service standards, collection development policies, user service benchmarks, and other performance metrics." Of course, archivists should continue to manage records by following best practices, but the practices listed are incomplete and an odd assembly, perhaps rooted in the language *du jour*. Archivists should advocate for the development and use of best practices and standards that help ensure the sustainability of archives, the longevity of materials, and their accessibility and use, but we should expect these to evolve over time. We shouldn't need to update the core values to account for them. Furthermore, this language in the core value must allow for more flexibility to accommodate a shared stewardship approach in which archivists include stakeholders in decision-making or allow alternative ways of knowing to inform arrangement and description. In a postcustodial approach, archivists are experts, but not the only experts, in archival decision-making. Respectful stewards would adapt to the approaches that best serve the needs of stakeholder communities and their environments.

As we replace custody with stewardship, we also should put people, rather than holdings, first. This core value does not need to answer definitively who has authority or control over how records are managed, but it certainly can demand that archivists consider their relationships to people—in the past, present, and future— and the consequences of their decisions on people in managing archives or offering archival services. By prioritizing archivists' obligations to people, this core value can accommodate evolving practices to treat archives as shared investments managed collaboratively with a community.

The American Anthropological Association has an ethical principle to "do no harm." This principle states that anthropologists should not do "harm to dignity, and to bodily and material well-being, especially . . . among vulnerable populations," and that "this primary obligation can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge." It encourages anthropologists to give "deliberate and thoughtful consideration of potential unintended consequences and long-term impacts on individuals, communities,

identities, tangible intangible heritage and environments."[77] This approach to cultural sensitivity can help shape a revised core value. Following are my suggested revisions. I offer these suggestions not as a perfect draft but as a starting point for conversations about how to revise this value in the future so it may more accurately reflect and inform current and evolving practice.

Current	Revised
Responsible Custody: Archivists ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. As responsible stewards, archivists are committed to making reasonable and defensible choices for the holdings of their institutions. They strive to balance the sometimes competing interests of various stakeholders. Archivists are judicious stewards who manage records by following best practices in developing facilities, service standards, collection development policies, user service benchmarks, and other performance metrics. They collaborate with external partners for the benefit of users and public needs. In certain situations, archivists recognize the need to deaccession materials so that resources can be strategically applied to the most essential or useful materials.	**Responsible Stewardship:** Archivists consider the welfare, rights, needs, cultures, and contexts of the people and groups affected by archival decisions and practices. Archivists sensitively and respectfully balance these considerations with commitments to a diverse historical record, institutional missions, professional ethics, and public interest. Archivists advocate for the conditions, resources, partnerships, and policies necessary for the long-term integrity and accessibility of evidence about the past. Archivists apply professional standards and best practices to manage archives in effective, sustainable, and respectful ways. Archivists seek collaborations for the benefit of communities, archives, users, and public needs. They make informed, defensible choices when considering stakeholder interests, determining priorities, allocating resources, weighing risks, and carrying out their work.

Notes

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