

ARCHIVAL
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF MARK A. GREENE
VALUES

SAA PREVIEW

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VALUES

EDITED BY CHRISTINE WEIDEMAN &
MARY A. CALDERA

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SOCIETY OF
**American
Archivists**

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For
Mark A. Greene,
who understood the power of values



*"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."*

—Gandhi

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTINE WEIDEMAN & MARY A. CALDERA

Mark A. Greene was one of the most influential archivists of his generation on US archival theory and practice. As practitioner, administrator, teacher, theorist, and leader, he helped shape the modern American archivist identity. Through an uncompromising, and at times, surprisingly optimistic belief in the archival enterprise and its practitioners, he forged a vision of a powerful, socially valuable, cohesive profession “with the power of defining and making accessible the primary sources of history, primary sources that protect rights, educate students, inform the public, and support a primal human need to understand our past.”¹

When those of us who worked with Mark, or served with him on committees and task forces, or benefited from his writings and presentations, learned that he was retiring due to ill health, we knew the profession was experiencing a profound loss. During the course of his career, Mark served on ten professional boards and committees, published thirty articles, presented twenty-three conference papers, developed and taught workshops on appraisal around the country, served as president of both the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and was named an SAA Distinguished Fellow. He was awarded the SAA Council Exemplary Service Award, and, under his leadership, the American Heritage Center received the SAA Distinguished Service Award. He mentored countless archivists, both experienced and new to the profession. For three decades, with grace, collegiality, and good humor, Mark provided commentary, guidance, insight, and leadership to help define what it means to be an archivist and our contributions to society.

In thinking through how to honor one who had so much influence on our work,

the obvious choice was to publish a festschrift of essays reflecting on his contributions or how they inspired the work of others. We determined to offer a different kind of festschrift, however, and focus it instead on one of Mark's most important contributions, one in which he took a great deal of pride: the establishment of a core set of values for the archival profession. Mark defined the need for such a set of values, and identified the ten he thought most important, in his 2008 SAA presidential address.² At the end of his term as president of SAA, he set up a task force to draft a set for consideration by SAA Council. Three years later, after various task force drafts had been reviewed and a final draft submitted for member feedback, Council approved our current "SAA Core Values of Archivists"³ (read the Core Values statement in the Appendix). As Randall C. Jimerson, a member of the values task force, notes in his essay on Social Responsibility for this volume, the final statement "followed remarkably closely the list of values suggested by Mark Greene."⁴ In his address, Mark explained that the value of the values is less about the actual content (although that too is important) and more in the collective engagement with them. "When values are shared, a new level of shared meaning evolves, leading to aligned, effective, action and results—in other words, power."⁵

Since adoption of the values, no writings have examined how they are being practiced or how they influence the day-to-day work of archivists. Yet they are at the very core of what the archival profession stands for. We wanted to fill that void and, in so doing, honor Mark's extraordinary commitment to the profession. In this volume, for each of the eleven values, archivists comment on what the value means to them and how it reflects and impacts archival work. In tribute to Mark's work to support archivists and archival work across the profession, the twenty-three contributors come from a variety of repositories—from government archives to corporate archives and everything in between—and range from two years of professional experience to more than thirty. As a result, the commentaries demonstrate extraordinary breadth on what the values actually mean, their influence, and their embodiment in practice. Some authors include reflections on Mark's work and contributions, but others do not, because, while this volume honors Mark, it is about the values themselves.

We arranged the essays according to the major themes that run through many of Mark's writings: why we are here; what we do; and how we do it. The why essays pertain to the values History and Memory, Social Responsibility, and Diversity and Accountability and they address the most fundamental aspects of archives' value to society. The what values—Responsible Custody, Selection, Access and Use, Preservation, and Advocacy—relate more specifically to what we do in service of our broader mission. The how essays, on Service and Professionalism, address the ways and manners in which we carry out our professional responsibilities.

The essays are as varied as their writers, but a few themes emerge and are notable. Mark would be pleased, we think, with the centrality of people in the essays, whether creators, users, or archivists themselves. Additionally, the sometimes inextricability of value from practice in some of the essays is noteworthy. These essays discuss the values in definitional terms rather than in philosophical ones. This suggests that some

practitioners may find the values more accessible as a prescription for or a description of what we do rather than as a value system that helps us reflect on why we do what we do. Many essayists comment on the interrelatedness of the values and, as if to demonstrate the point, expound on more than one. Finally, in acts of deepest engagement, several of the authors offer revisions to the definitions of the values about which they write, and one argues that his value should not even be on the list of values. We believe this volume could be the first in what could become periodic reviews of our values (Mark would say, “wrestling with them”), especially in light of how quickly our work is changing. To slightly modify Mark’s concluding remarks in his presidential address, periodic redefining and recommitting to our values can only increase and broaden our power as a profession and as professionals.⁶

As editors of this volume, we have found that working with the authors and reading the essays have caused us to be much more consciously mindful of how the values undergird our daily work. The essays have caused us to rethink our own interpretations of the values and to think about them in new ways. They have renewed our appreciation for the extraordinary work going on across the profession and the dedication that archivists bring to it. We think the work herein can be an excellent teaching tool for students as they develop their own understandings of what it means to be an archivist.

Mark died in 2017, before he had the chance to read this volume. We think he would have been more than pleased with the archival power manifested in these essays and the work of their authors and professional archivists across the country.

Notes

¹ Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (2009): 40, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.72.1.k0322x0p38v44l53>. Originally presented as SAA presidential address, 2008.

² Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 17–41.

³ “Core Values of Archivists,” Society of American Archivists, May 2011, https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics#core_values, captured at <https://perma.cc/UU2L-TWGN>.

⁴ Mark’s definitions often overlap with those adopted by SAA, but the names he applies to his values sometimes differ. Jimerson goes on to note, “The most substantial difference between Greene’s initial list of values and that formally adopted by SAA was the addition of ‘social responsibility.’” Michelle Light notes in her essay that responsible custody was also not on Mark’s list.

⁵ Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 39.

⁶ Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 41.

About the Editors



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