

Community Archives: what are we really talking about?

Anne Gilliland¹ and Andrew Flinn²

¹ University of California Los Angeles Department of Information Studies ² University College London
Department of Information Studies

Abstract: In the past decade, the field of community archiving has developed a strong presence in some parts of the world, but not in others. Despite the perhaps near universal practice of individuals and communities collecting materials which they deem to be significant in ways that are not necessarily subject to professional oversight or located in formal institutional settings, in some countries this practice has been recognized and described as ‘community archiving’, in other countries different terms are used and in others still such activities have received little or no recognition. Moreover, the characteristics of what are being labeled as community archives and community archiving vary considerably across different settings, driven by complexes of considerations such as social justice, a focus on common identities and experiences, and a desire to document communities historically under-represented in mainstream archives. Certainly, community archives are more likely explicitly to foreground issues of power and politics in their archival endeavors than are mainstream archives but are there other factors which also characterize some or all of these endeavors? Drawing upon their own work in different national contexts, the writers address a series of questions with the aim of providing a better understanding of the world of community archiving, the impact of technology on the practice and the relationship of community archives to other activities and disciplines, including community informatics.

Keywords: community-based archives; community informatics; social movements

Introduction

In the past decade, recognition of the activity of community archiving has developed a strong presence in some parts of the world, but not in others. Despite the perhaps near universal practice of individuals and communities collecting materials which they deem to be significant in ways that are not necessarily subject to professional oversight or located in formal institutional settings, in some countries this practice has been recognized and described by those in the archival field as ‘community archiving’, in other countries different terms are used and in others still such activities have received little or no recognition. For many in the archival field, community archives represent a vital and timely opening up of the possibilities of archival endeavor, for others they represent a more worrisome, threatening development. Moreover, the characteristics of what are being labeled as community archives and community archiving vary considerably across different settings and cultural contexts, driven by complexes of considerations such as social justice, a focus on common identities and experiences, and a desire to document communities historically under-represented in mainstream archives. Certainly, community archives are more likely explicitly to foreground issues of power and politics in their archival endeavors than are mainstream archives but are there other factors that also characterize some or all of these endeavors?

Drawing upon our own research, teaching and service learning in different national and international contexts, this paper will consider several questions in seeking to understand the world of community archiving. It will be structured around 6 main question areas:

1. Is it possible for a formal definition of community archiving to be developed or is its conceptual fluidity part of its appeal and strength?
2. What distinguishes community archives and archiving from other kinds of archives and archival activities? And indeed what if anything distinguishes community archives from other kinds of community-based heritage activities, museums and resource centers?

3. To what extent has the use of technology driven the social purposes and agendas of community archives?
4. How do community archives and their priorities evolve over time?
5. What kinds of community, institutional and professional relationships form around community archiving and to what extent and when are they based in mutuality and equity or formed out of necessity?
6. Finally, how might a closer proximity between community informatics and community archiving benefit each field?

The intention of our paper is to offer a framework which might lead to a better understanding of what community-based archives are and what they seek to achieve, drawing upon both how those active in community archives articulate their aims and objectives, and the observations of those who work with community archives. The first half of this paper will examine how community archives and community-based archival activity might be defined, described or characterized and the second half will look at the relationships that develop and may develop in the future between community archives and other community-focused activities. In the first half of the paper Flinn describes community-based archiving from a mainly UK perspective, whilst in the second half Gilliland examines such endeavors from a mainly but not exclusively US perspective. It is important to recognize that these perspectives and the practice of community-based archiving in these two jurisdictions naturally differ in some significant ways (responding to history, culture, governance, etc) as well as demonstrating considerable points of congruence.

Is it possible for a formal definition of community archiving to be developed or is its conceptual fluidity part of its appeal and strength?

In the United Kingdom as elsewhere the last decade has experienced a significance upsurge in recognition and interest in the practice of independent and community-based archiving from archival and other heritage practitioners, archival researchers and funding bodies. For the most part, recognition of the activity of archiving within and by a community, often at some remove from formal professional oversight has focused on the importance of the activity and the collections. A very influential milestone in this respect was the UK's Archive Task Force report *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future* (2004) which noted that the important development of the growth community archives 'stem[med] from a desire by individuals and groups to record and share culturally diverse experiences and stories' and further asserted that the resulting 'archives in the community [were] as important to society as those in public collections'. The growing visibility of community-based archives has also provoked some dissenting professional voices ('The one bright spot is that we may be able to advise community archives on shelving', 'Everyone knows that community is usually shorthand for either "race" or "class"'') that mirror older dismissive attitudes to the non-professional curated materials (Anon 2011; Maher 1998). For external commentators, especially professional ones, many of these positive and negative responses are a reaction to what these activities reveal about perceived failings, absences and misrepresentations in 'mainstream' archival and heritage institutions and the challenge to these failings, the professionals and the theories that are responsible for them, that community-based archives represent.

Is it possible to go beyond the fetishisation of community archives and arrive at a definition which accurately describes community archives or at least establishes an outline of a field which could encompass all community-based archive activity? Certainly this is not uncontested territory, usage of the terms 'community', 'archive' and 'community archives' are disputed from both within and without the world of community archives. It may be that the diversity, fluidity and lack of fixity which makes the community archive sector so dynamic and vibrant, also means that attempts at providing useable yet inclusive definitions are destined to be unsatisfactory and more importantly misunderstand the point of such activity. Perhaps in the context of registering (and even celebrating) uncertainty, we should be

hesitant in trying to define diversity. Colleagues and collaborators from University College London have recently written about the difficulty and futility of trying to define the related field of community-based archaeology and reducing it to a subject of academic gaze when such community-based initiatives are primarily about action and doing, in a variety of locations and for a variety of purposes:

To define community archaeology – narrowly or broadly – serves little useful purpose at this point and if this book demonstrates one thing it is the rich diversity of activities and initiatives taking place under this convenient banner. A few common threads have emerged, such as cooperation between professional and non-professional archaeologists, and the belief that archaeology does not have to take place in private between consenting companies....That there is no obvious need to define community archaeology does not mean that it should not be studied...These are signs of maturity and critical reflection on our practices, but intellectual ruminations should not perhaps be taken to the extreme of turning community archaeology into a principally academic subject – this would be contrary to the spirit of pluralism and openness that characterizes [the field] (Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012).

We can make much the same argument for community-based archive activity. Whilst it is usually legitimate for external parties, whether they be from the heritage professions or from the academy, to wish to describe and better understand by seeking to establish a sense of the field of study or interaction, perhaps with an aim of working and interacting with community archives on the basis of equitable partnership, but that should be done without seeking to exclude or impose purpose. Though difficult to avoid in any descriptive analysis, we need to guard against imposing inappropriate terminologies, motivations and worldviews. Whatever the value of academic research and critical reflection – as with community archaeology – we run the risk of forgetting that in essence community-based archives (and other community-based heritage activities) are diverse, real world interventions into the field of local, regional and national even international archival and heritage narratives, often critical interventions, politically charged with notions of social justice and civil rights.

In seeking to understand the world of community archives without imposing an overly restrictive and exclusive definition, there are two approaches which should be helpful. First we can look at the usage of the term by those intimately involved in that world and reflect on how those participating in community archives or in community-based archival activity have described and understood what they do. Second we can begin the process, drawing upon our research, observations and experience of working with community archives, of identifying some common attributes or characteristics, some of which but not all, the diverse participants in the field of community archives may share. However before we embark on this discussion, we do need to acknowledge that the employment of these terms can be problematic. Although as a term ‘community archives’ has acquired reasonably widespread usage and acceptance in the UK and internationally, it is frequently used to mean different things and in some cases its very usage is repudiated.

Concern with the term includes the use and implied meanings of ‘community’ and ‘archive’ as well as with ‘community archive’. Unease over the use of ‘community’ is common and relates to a lack of clear definition, its ubiquitous use in government policy-speak and its associated potential for being used in an ill-defined fashion by media and state bodies as a device for denoting the ‘otherness’ and ‘separateness’ of the specific group in society being described as a community (as in the black community, the Asian community or the gay community), whose interests and concerns can be therefore ignored as being not reflective of the majority of society. Qualification of the term as independent community archives, community-based or community-led archives at least indicates that the control of the activity is embedded within the group in question (Alleyne 2002a; Waterton and Smith 2010; Flinn and Stevens 2009).

Criticisms of the use of the term ‘archive’ to describe these endeavors and their collections is less prevalent but has resulted in disapproval from some professional archivists who wish to uphold a narrower and more traditional understanding of archive and archives. This questioning of the appropriateness of using the term archive to describe community-based

archives focuses on both the non-traditional materials collected including consciously created documentary materials, material objects, published works, oral history testimonies, audio-visual materials, organizational and personal ephemera, clothes and works of art, and perhaps more significantly also on the collections' archival value, reliability and authenticity. Such judgments though not entirely absent from the profession appear considerably less common than ten years ago, in the UK at least (Maher 1998, 254; Anonymous Viewpoint 2011).

This brings us back to the validity of the compound term 'community archive' and the designation by external observers of bodies which do not use the term themselves as community archives. Whilst there are many initiatives in the UK and elsewhere which have actively associated themselves with the term 'community archive', there are many others who have been identified by others as belonging to this category without ever adopting the term themselves. Although it can be misleading and arrogant to categorize activities from an external vantage point, we would argue that as long as it is employed sensitively and carefully the term community-based archives can be used to help us think and talk about broadly similar initiatives that might be termed independent archives and libraries, oral history projects, local heritage groups, community museums, community resource and archive centres as well as those self-identifying as community archives or allying with a community archives movement, in way that allows us to identify the similarities as well as the differences between these endeavors. The authors of this paper hold to the view that whilst the terminology that groups use to describe themselves is clearly very significant, just as telling is the nature of the activity itself and the motivations which inspire the activity. As a rule discussion in the UK has acknowledged these difficulties and has focused on the activity rather than the form or terminology. The accepted definitions or descriptions of independent community archives have tended to be broad and inclusive, emphasizing diversity and variety rather than being prescriptive and dogmatic.

Pre-2000 references to Community Archives

So what can we say about how the term has been used in the past by those involved in community-based archives and aligned with a community archive movement. Using a google search to identify published references to community archive/s prior to 2000 (when the term began to take on widespread and common usage in the UK in particular) provides some interesting (though hardly scientific) results and evidence of distinctive usages. Not surprisingly the majority of these references place the emphasis on the 'community' part of the term (be it local or a particular national, faith or ethnic community) and then refer to the archives of that community. So for instance, the Amana Community archive (note the lower case), documenting the German Pietist settlements in Iowa (an early reference found by this search, Durnbaugh 1959, 383) or references to nineteenth century wedding records in the Budapest Jewish Community Archive (Csillag 1987) or local community archives such as the Alhemi Community Archive (Canada) or the North Otago Museum community archive (New Zealand), both referred to as such in 1990s. The German 'gemeindearchiv' could be translated as a local, municipal or borough archive but it is often translated directly as community archive (Thode 1992). As we will argue later developments in technologies, including community computing, for storing and sharing digital materials had a significant impact on the development of community archives and this is also apparent in some of the early descriptions of automated or online community archives (Coutaz 1991; Carroll et al 1999; comm@NET UK 2000, 16).

A different sense or usage, whilst still describing a predominantly local activity, can be found in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s and 1990s where 'community archives', such as the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) funded Totnes Community and the Ifracombe Community Archives and the QueenSpark affiliated Brighton Community Fishing Archive, suggested an approach embracing oral history and an operation independent of or at least at arm's length from the mainstream heritage sector (Ward 1990; Osmond 1998).

Finally we can also identify a usage in 1980s and 1990s which not only suggests an archive recording the history of a particular (usually non-local) community, and an

independence from mainstream memory institutions but also the collection of archives and use of history with the objective of challenging mainstream historical and political narratives and the exclusions and falsifications therein. This type of usage covered a wide range of initiatives and can be found in many different countries including the South African History Archive which in 1993 described its mission of documenting the liberation movement and anti-apartheid struggles as “Introducing the Community Archive: The South African History Archive ... Keeping Our History Alive” (SAHA 1993). Similarly the South African Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA) which was formed as a community archive within an academic institution (the University of Witwatersrand) in 1997 supporting academic research ‘while maintaining its primary function as repository of community histories and cultural artefacts’ and which ‘in keeping with the concept of a community archive’ encouraged its community ‘to participate in determining what should be preserved in the archives’ (GALA 2005, 228-229). Elsewhere the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago was described as a BDSM / fetish community archive (Bienvenu 1998, 115) established in 1993 ‘out of pressing need to foster a sub-cultural identity and sense of community history’ which might otherwise disappear (Getsy 1998, 69). Finally Crooke refers the 1997 plans to establish a community archive in republican East Belfast to support the empowerment of the community through accessing community and Republican history in the area (Crooke 2007, 125).

Evidently from the late 1990s onwards we can detect a more frequent use of ‘community archive’ as a term suggesting something distinct from the archives of a local and/or identity-based community, evolving into something which also implied at least a degree of separation and autonomy from the mainstream and in some cases a more explicit challenge to rectify the absences and misrepresentations of mainstream collections and institutions. Certainly in the UK after 2000, the term was increasingly used to describe a collection of archival material developed and shared within (and sometimes beyond) a specific community without the necessary support of professional archivists and beyond the walls (and virtual spaces, for many of these new community archives were making use of the web to share their collections) of any formal archive. So much so that by the middle of the decade it was possible to talk of a community archives movement developing in the UK with its own organization and conference.

The development of a Community Archives movement in the UK

Observers of community archives have tended to distinguish between those politically and culturally motivated endeavours acting to counter to the absences and misrepresentations relating to a particular group or community in mainstream archives and other heritage narratives and those whose the inspiration is not so directly or overtly political or cultural, but rather is a manifestation of a shared enthusiasm for the history of a place, occupation or interest. Whilst it is an important distinction, the authors would also contend that even in the most nostalgic and leisure-orientated community archive projects there is something inherently political in individuals and communities taking an active role in the re-telling of their own history. In common with other more explicitly political archives, these groups are frequently motivated to tell histories and save archives that they believe would not otherwise be saved and would not be heard. Most community archives exist in part as a response to the perception that official heritage bodies are not interested in their stories but for some working-class, minority ethnic or LGBTQ community archives this perception is informed by a well-established and frequently justified mistrust or hostility towards the mainstream heritage institutions based on bitter past experience of interactions with these bodies and by a desire to challenge these misrepresentations. Those groups, reacting to these absences and the widespread perception of a lack of interest from the mainstream heritage sector, established their own archives, frequently as part of a broader agenda of social justice and political transformation, and might best be considered either as social movements or as part of a broader social movement informed by agendas of social justice, civil rights and political transformation (Crooke 2007, 27; Flinn & Stevens 2009, 7).

The UK community archive movement seeks to embrace these two traditions and approaches under one roof. Local history and antiquarian societies have been collecting and sharing archival materials for 100 years or more. In the immediate post World War II period the collections of some of these societies became the basis for local archive, library or museum services but some remained independent creating, collecting and holding archives of local community relevance. From the 1960s onwards, drawing inspiration from new social history approaches, the New Left and civil rights movements, these local archives were joined by a growing number of initiatives recovering 'hidden histories' and challenging what was collected and displayed in mainstream archives and museums, established a range of working-class, women's, Black, gay and lesbian history and archive bodies. As befits initiatives dedicated to the salvaging and bringing hidden histories to light, oral history was often a key component of their approach, but other materials including traditional archival records were frequently core parts of the collections. It is worth noting that not all these initiatives used the term archive and fewer still used the term 'community archive'. Alongside archives were (and are) libraries, museums, institutes, resource centers, info-shops and autonomous spaces. We shall return to the possible distinctions between these different institutions later in this paper but despite the differences in their names and the communities whose stories they represented, there were also profound similarities in terms of the types of materials they collected and used, and the political purposes for which they utilized these 'useful' histories. Many of these collections and independent institutions from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s have eventually made their way into professional, often higher education, repositories but others have remained largely independent and autonomous, committed to retaining control over the resources for the production of their history.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a period of community history projects, partly funded through a range of government work creation and skills exchange programs (notably the oral history community history and archive projects funded by the MSC mentioned earlier). Although this activity declined for a while in the early 1990s or at least became less visible as funding dried up, the late 1990s and 2000s witnessed a large revival of all sorts of community heritage and archive activity, particularly in those areas where communities had gone or were going through substantial social and economic change. A combination of developments in the web, community computing and social technologies with substantial public funding via the Heritage Lottery Fund and others aimed at stimulating positive social benefits such as greater community cohesion and understanding, inter-generational and communal exchange, and individual and community well-being through participation in heritage, particularly community-based heritage, led to a significant revival and growth of this kind of activity alongside those new and existing projects which drew their inspiration from a profound desire to re-appropriate control over the "writing of one's own story" (Flinn & Stevens 2009; comm@NET 2000, 16; Jura 2009; Hall 2005).

These developments were recognized by professional bodies and as already suggested by government policy makers and funders, resulting in a host of initiatives and programs which sought to support, extend and understand the work and impact of community archives such as the Community Access to Archives project (2003-2004), the establishment of the Community Archives Development Group (CADG) and reports such as the "Impact of Community Archives" (CADG 2007) and the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) commissioned Community Archives and the Sustainable Communities Agenda (Jura 2009). In time CADG evolved from being an ad-hoc body made up of individuals involved and interested in community archives into the Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG), a membership body which seeks to represent, advocate for and provide services such as a website (www.communityarchives.org.uk), an annual conference and advice and guidance on archival practice to the community archive movement.¹ A sign of the extent to which professional recognition of the status of community-based archives and community-

¹ One of the authors of this paper (Flinn) has been a member of the steering committee / executive of CADG / CAHG since 2005 and served as chair 2010-2011 and vice-chair 2012 to the time of writing.

based archivists had evolved beyond the traditional indifference and disparagement was the incorporation in 2012 of CAHG as a special interest group within the Archives and Records Association (ARA), the recently re-organised professional body (Flinn 2013).

The Community Archives and Heritage Group - describing community-based archives.

CAHG has developed and uses its own description and definitions of community archiving. The group's website (communityarchives.org.uk), in part functions as a directory and link to community archives in the UK. As the directory entries are uploaded by volunteers and self selection by groups, the directory is far from comprehensive but it does give a sense of the variety of archives that are identified as community archives in the UK. However entry on the site is not unmediated, the website administrator on behalf of the CAHG committee, decides whether a proposed group is a community archive or not, with inclusiveness and self-definition being the starting point but not the only criteria. Early on, the CAHG committee agreed a working description of community archives and their activities:

1. *The subject-matter of the collection is a community of people. The classic example is a group of people who live in the same location, but there are 'communities of interest' as well, such as people who worked in a certain profession.*
2. *The process of creating the collection has involved the community. Typically, this means that volunteers have played a key role, sometimes alongside professional archivists.*

The key elements are that there should be actual collections (physical or digital) so that it should not just be a history group without collections, the subject matter of the collection should be about a particular community and that the community should be involved in the archive. The latter attribute was designed to differentiate community archives from single collectors. Of course none of these criteria are necessarily absolutely clear or firm. The intention is to be as inclusive and flexible as possible whilst retaining some boundaries to ease the administration and coherence of the site. How the community is to be involved in the archive is for instance capable of different interpretation. In 2013 the CAHG committee debated whether community involvement necessitated the active participation of more than one member of the community in the running of the archive while others argued that a largely personal collection might properly be considered a community archive if it was open to the community who actively engaged with and exhibited a sense of ownership over the collection and the stories it told. The committee agreed that it was impossible to narrowly define what community participation might look like in every instance.

In 2009 when the Community Archive and Heritage Group was launched as a membership body, a vision statement was also approved by the annual conference describing community archives and their activities in as deliberately as broad and inclusive terms as possible:

Community archives and heritage initiatives come in many different forms (large or small, semi-professional or entirely voluntary, long-established or very recent, in partnership with heritage professionals or entirely independent) and seek to document the history of all manner of local, occupational, ethnic, faith and other diverse communities.

By collecting, preserving and making accessible documents, photographs, oral histories and many other materials which document the histories of particular groups and localities, community archives and heritage initiatives make an invaluable contribution to the preservation of a more inclusive and diverse local and national heritage.

By avoiding defining community archives too prescriptively and instead offering a broad description, the UK Group avoided the trap of too tightly classifying what is a very fluid and evolving movement. This meant that the CAHG was able to maintain a dialogue between those groups who were interested in local history and worked closely with local

heritage professionals, perhaps even being started by the local museum or archive, and those groups with a stronger sense of political purpose, independence and community ownership. By adopting this approach, CAHG has taken a position similar to that outlined by policy makers like MLA who recognized community-based archiving including ‘a project initiated by the community, driven by the community using predominantly community materials’ as well as a ‘project initiated by statutory organisation, which encourages involvement and deposit of information from communities’ and all activities in between (Jura 2009, 12).

Of course such a broad based approach is not without its tensions and criticisms. Commenting on the very broad-based descriptions outlined on the Community Archives website, one person posted a much more radical and exclusive definition of community archives:

A community archive is an archive managed by a community organization, that is, an organization which is not-for-profit and non-governmental. Community organizations are expected to be independent of government and to challenge government.

Community archives will differ from those sponsored by the state, which clearly will be promoting their own interests (Boucher, 2006).

By emphasizing the independence of the community archive and the challenge posed to the state and dominant narratives, Boucher echoes the descriptions of activist ‘community’ archives such as those articulated at a conference on community archives organized in South Africa in the late 1990s by the newly established Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA). As we have already noted political archives which challenged state archive and heritage representations in South Africa had referred to community archives since at least the early 1990s and a report on the conference in the *South African Archives* journal by Kathy Eagles (1998) noted that ‘a key premise of community archiving is to give substance to a community’s right to own its own memories’ and that ‘community participation is a core principle of community archives’. The authors of this piece would tend to agree that the essence of community-based archives is the control and participation by community members, not merely the community being the focus of the archive but also recognize the efficacy of the broader, more inclusive descriptions.

Characteristics and attributes

If it is not possible to offer a tighter definition, we can try to identify some characteristics which, based on our work with and observations of many community-based archives over a number of years, may be common to some or many (if not all) community-based archives and which we hope will help observers better understand the field and the place of specific endeavours within the field. The Voice Identity Activism (VIA) community-centric framework developed by Gilliland (2014, 20-21) and presented to the CIRN conference in 2012 is a more comprehensive and detailed framework than the characteristics relating to form, motivations, and objectives of independent community-based archives described here, and there is a job of work of to be done mapping these two approaches together. However it is clear that there is a great deal of similarity and overlap between the two attempts to frame the field of community-based archiving and this in of itself suggests that we are proceeding on the right lines here.

Collections

- The collections can either be the accumulated archive of a community (records of the community’s organizations, individual and collective life) or can be an archive actively collected and collated for and by a community to tell that community’s history. The type of items typically found within a community-based archive are rich and diverse, often including materials not traditionally considered to be an archive or have sufficient archival value to be retained. In the case of the community-based archive it is better to consider the subject of the material and the significance or value that it has within the community rather than its type or format.

Form

- Though there are many community-based endeavors that utilise the term archive, many others with a similar aims, objectives, collections and form use different designations such as library, museum, resource centre, etc. Whilst we need to recognise the differences that this terminology describes we also need to be open to the similarities as well. As above, in term of collections and activities, traditional profession distinctions between museums, libraries and archives often make little sense in a community-based context.
- Although the reach, visibility and take-up of community-based archiving has been profoundly impacted by digital technology, community-based archives have a long history with recognizable physical, independent community archives, historical societies, libraries and resource centres being in existence for 30, 40, sometimes over 100 years, and thus community-based archives take the form of physical as well as digital archives and frequently operate in both environments.
- As discussed elsewhere, roles within community-based archives often do not fall into the clearly defined categories we might expect to find in mainstream heritage bodies. Collectors and curators, community archivists and the users of community archives are often the same individuals. Many community archives are based around one or two key personal collections, with these collectors often being at the core of the organisation providing much of the inspiration and drive. The personal sacrifice and drive to document that many of these central figures exhibit is both crucial to the initial growth and survival of these archives but also represents a potential problem in terms of identifying equally committed successors to take on the archive.

Aims and objectives

- Typically community-based archives are what might be termed ‘living archives’ in that they are not collected for preservation and passively curated for some future potential use, they have been collected and ‘constituted’ as an archive so that they can be actively used, engaged with and be employed in the ‘now’ for the purposes of education, building solidarity, constructing ‘shared community heritages’ to identify with, supporting contemporary struggles, the social production of knowledge, and challenging the absences and misrepresentations in other mainstream collections and public history accounts. As such community-based archives may act as sites of resistance and subversion in the present and a map for future aspiration as much they are interested in documenting the past (Appadurai 2003).
- Community-based archives are thus a challenge and critical intervention which disputes the authority of traditional institutions in telling histories and in so doing seek to ‘re-appropriate control over the “writing of one’s own story” as part of a wider process of cultural liberation’ (Hall 2001 & 2005). Such interventions into the mainstream and challenges to existing public histories which ignore or misrepresent are the commonest of all community archive impulses. Even if generally less explicitly political in their agenda, many locally-focussed community-based archives exhibit similar motivations, especially if there is a class or ethnic dimension to their focus on place.
- Community-based archives and other heritage activity often represent what we can also characterise as archival or heritage activism, which sees history-production as a participative practice, a form of Do It Yourself cultural and political activity which engages with and promotes a ‘useful’ past as a form of social movement activism.
- The physicality of the archive as a building, as a space is often very significant in a community-based context. In some cases, the physical archive represents a concrete and irrefutable expression of the community’s existence and assertion of its history and identity. In the UK the founders of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), inspired by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York visualised the

BCA as permanent monument to people of African heritage and of the Black presence in the UK. The opening of the new prestigious BCA Raleigh Hall building in 2014 represents the final opening of this ‘monument’ after over thirty years of work and sacrifice (Garrison 1994; Walker 1997; Hopkins 2008).

- The community-based archive can also be a space of safety and autonomy, in which the collections not only act as a resource for research but also as the context and backdrop for social activities, political organisation, emotional responses in a space belonging to the community independent and separate from hostile or prejudiced external forces. Many users of community-based organisations including archives speak of the importance and security of having a safe space controlled and maintained by the community (Cvetkovich 2003).
- These spaces can be places of safety, recuperation, contemplation and remembrance but also places where resistance can be planned and things can be made to happen. Stephen Small (1997, 61) describes the value of independent, Black cultural institutions in the UK as being ‘safe spaces in which we can decide our priorities and work towards them without hindrance by those hostile to our goals or by those with good intentions who don’t share our priorities’. The Infoshop and social centre movement often provides spaces to consult archives of previous struggles, debate and plan action and much more:

‘We run a book exchange, a free bike workshop, host a regular practical squatters meeting, offer meeting space and have a massive open-access archive. We also hold useful information – useful for thought, research/publishing and activity to change things. With all of these things in operation we still primarily happily continue the tradition of radical spaces where people can meet each other. That seems the most radical thing possible. For people to meet and talk and to argue and to agree or not. After the talking, activity might happen. That’s what we want, That’s what we encourage here.’ (56a Infoshop 2008)

Structures & governance:

- The definition of the community that the archive purports to represent, how that community is defined and how that community’s authority and/or approval of the archive is demonstrated are all important structural characteristics of how we understand different community-based archives. Did the archive develop organically from within the community, led by one or two key individuals from within that community and recognised by the community as an authentic voice of that community, that recognition and community approval signified by use of the collections and representation on the archives governance structures? Or was the archive largely the initiative and construction of an external individual or agency (governmental or heritage) which established an archive to preserve and share the history of a community and then attempted to involve the community in its curatorial and governance structures? Furthermore is the community identity promoted a fluid, flexible and inclusive one or is it a more inward looking, essentialized and exclusive identity that the collections are being employed to support?
- In terms of the governance and administrative structures of community-based archives there are distinctions between those that have a close working relationship with official bodies including the heritage professions, accepting some or all of their funds from state sources, and those for whom the principles of community ownership, self-determination, autonomy, independence from hostile or antagonistic external forces and community control over historical resources and the authority to represent the community’s stories are central to their purpose and being.
- The reasons for wishing to establish and maintain an independent community-based archive can vary from the pragmatic (geographic distance from the nearest memory institution, lack of awareness of any mainstream cultural institution interested in the

community's history and collections or fear that these collections might be 'swallowed up', made inaccessible and no longer in the control of the community if handed over to a mainstream institution) to the more political, where the desire for autonomy and separateness derives from community hostility or ambivalence based on previous experiences with heritage or state institutions and from ideology which derives empowerment, solidarity and consciousness from self-determination and control of the community's resources. The fundamental failures of mainstream heritage and archives to represent these histories (at all or fairly) has resulted in demands to refigure, queer and destabilize the archive and its hierarchies (anarchivism) and establish something different, separate, transformed (Jezeq & Atchu 2012; Cvetkovich 2012). In the words of John La Rose 'you should not depend on an establishment with which you are at times in conflict for the validation of your culture and history' (Alleyne 2002, 124)

- This will be dealt in more detail later in this paper but community-based archives and the priorities of community-based archiving are not fixed and unchanging. In common with other institutions and endeavours they develop and evolve over time. Community-based archives go through different stages, and whilst these may not be predictable or inevitable, there are some common developments. Some initiatives are established out of a desire to articulate contested histories from the start but others begin as resource center in support of current campaigns with largely contemporary collections before shifting over time to being focussed on collections of historical resource used to inform contemporary campaigns by better understanding past experiences or activisms, or develop from activist body/ies documenting their on-going activities to an archive focussed on researching and preserving records of current and past campaigns and organizations. Although these changes represent a shift in activity and immediate focus, we would also contend they are underpinned by strong continuities in terms of an activism in relationship to the collection and its usefulness in supporting contemporary actions (education, mobilisation, challenging hegemony). Later still, archives previously inspired by independence and community empowerment may find this independence and autonomy increasingly difficult or no longer programmatically necessary to sustain and the archives might develop a different even custodial relationship with mainstream heritage bodies such as university archives. However we should not assume that such a shift always marks the end of the radical potential of the community-based archival approach, indeed the insertion of the community-based archive into a relationship with the mainstream archive or museum may result in the changing, re-imagining or queering of that archive and its practice (Cvetkovich 2012). For some community-based archives collaboration with the mainstream and making an intervention into dominant heritage narratives whilst retaining control over the partnership and the collections is their main objective.

What distinguishes community archives and archiving from other kinds of archives and archival activities? And indeed what if anything distinguishes community archives from other kinds of community-based heritage activities, museums and resource centers?

Often implicit and sometimes explicit in these descriptions of community-based archive activity is a distinction being drawn between independent and community-based activities and mainstream, possibly professionalized, possibly publicly funded bodies. Certainly in some cases the very existence of the community-based archive or heritage activity is intended as a refutation of and challenge to the practices of the mainstream, professional heritage sector (Hopkins, 2008). However to guard against overstating or simplifying the differences between the approaches, it is worth acknowledging once again the variety of community-based archival activity and the eliding of the distinctions between more

formal and less formal heritage endeavors. As we have already seen some community-based archives and other heritage bodies may work closely with or even be initiated by mainstream institutions. There are also similarities between community-controlled archives and more established private even corporate bodies in contrast to public archives in terms of their primary responsibilities and audience being the immediate community rather than the general public. Some community-based archives, although established as a challenge to the absences and misrepresentations of mainstream collecting institutions also seek to model themselves on those institutions, hoping to embody the same authority to represent the community and to articulate communal narratives as is claimed by formal institutions. Following on from this last point, we should also avoid any too easy distinctions between professional and non-professional practice. Whilst community-based bodies may adopt a range of approaches to archival and heritage practice which are different from those adopted in more formal sectors, either through necessity (a lack of resources) or inclination (adopting practices and articulating a different sense of value and significance more in tune with specific cultural or political values), this does not mean that these bodies do not wish to care for their collections to the highest professional standards possible, or that indeed they do not have professional expertise embedded in their organizations, either as volunteers, advisors or as employees. Whilst it is true that many mainstream archive and heritage bodies are primarily concerned with preservation and enabling future use, and that many activist archives are more concerned with the use of the collections in the now, this does not necessarily equate to having little or no interest in ensuring longer-term preservation or archival practice.

Having acknowledged some of the similarities and blurring between the formal heritage sector and some community-based archives, it is still possible to identify some fairly common characteristics which indicate difference. For instance although the distinctions between users, volunteers and consumers are not as clear as we might sometimes assume in the formal sector, there are even less clear in a community-based setting where the boundaries between the personal collector, the curator, the volunteer and the user are very blurred with individuals often taking on these roles at different times or even at the same time. Again, allowing for the danger of over-simplification, but whereas mainstream curators are primarily concerned with the use and consumption of the materials by others, community-based archivists are often collecting, curating and consuming their collections in one continuous process motivated by a desire to preserve and articulate historical narratives otherwise absent for themselves and their communities.

The resources available and what that means for what different bodies are able to do (not least when they are seeking to collaborate with each other) is of course another significant distinction. Community-based archives may well receive, and indeed in some cases rely on public funding for their activities but it is frequently project-based funding and is rarely sustained or focused on developing the organization. The continual lack of regular capital and revenue funding has implications for physical resources including IT, preservation, storage and dissemination, and for the development of the human and intellectual resources of the archive. Not least it means that locating funding to sustain the archive and trying to ensure that the agendas of the funding agencies coincide (or at least do not conflict) with the group's aims and objectives can become the dominant activity. The dangers of reliance on such funding has encouraged some long-running archives such as radical archivists at the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York or the 'slow builders and consolidators' of the George Padmore Institute and Archive to value their autonomy and long-term sustainability above access to some or any public or non-community funds (Thistlethwaite 2000; Alleyne 2002). One of the consequences and dimensions of this commitment to independence and sustaining autonomy is the resulting dependence on the significant personal sacrifice (financial, physical and mental) of key activists and a network of volunteers, arising from great emotional and political commitment to the collections and their impacts. As we have already noted this commitment is both an enormous benefit to the archive but also a potential vulnerability with regard to the long term stability, succession and sustainability.

A final distinction already identified is the extent to which the distinctions between museums, libraries and archives rooted in history and the drawing up of professional spheres of expertise within much of the mainstream heritage sector makes much less sense in a community-based context. Sometimes a resource centre or library will evolve over time into an archive, perhaps denoting a shift from contemporary resources being used to support activity to the use of the past to support the activism. But for the most part the collections and type of materials held, the aims and objectives, and the structures of these organizations are broadly similar and transcend the silos in which the professional mainstream sector is to all too frequently to be found. Crooke (2007, 8-9) who also makes the link between community-based heritage activity and social movements describing 'unofficial' and community museums thus:

...[They] produce the most interesting, passionate and relevant exhibitions or collections reflecting their own experiences or priorities...they are sometimes transient, often personality led, and frequently only best used and known amongst the community from which they emerged...Rarely will a community group participate in heritage without reason; there are often distinct motivations behind such activity that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. Collecting oral histories, the creation of exhibitions and the formation of local history groups will often be drawn into the pursuit of other goals that can be social, economic or political.

Such a description could easily be applied to many of the community-based libraries and archives with which we have worked.

To what extent has the use of technology driven the social purposes and agendas of community archives?

We have already noted that developments in the web and social technology were a significant factor in what in the UK we might term the second wave of community-based archives and heritage activities in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The development and popularisation of cheap and relatively easy to use scan, upload and share software meant that it became easy to actively participate in the archival process by sharing and engaging with archival materials, images of objects, photographs of people and places in a social manner across communities that were no longer defined by geographic proximity and the ability to visit a physical exhibition or archive (de Groot 2009, 100-101). The facility to comment on, add new images and interact with the materials as well as with others via the web introduced a whole new dimension and visibility to community-based archival activity. The ability of geographically dispersed individuals to connect around and participate in the creation of a shared digital heritage (just as online communities cohered and fluxed around other non-heritage interests and identities) offered the possibility of transforming the reach and popularity of community-base archive activity into something which would support identity constructions that could address and challenge other marginalizations, diasporic dislocations and disempowerment. As already argued by acting to 're-appropriate control over the 'writing of one's own story' as part of a wider process of cultural liberation' (Hall 2005, 28) and as 'a tool for reworking desires and memories, part of a project for sustaining cultural identities' (Featherstone 2006, 594), digital community-based archives might support the building of communities, the mobilisation of solidarities and engendering a sense of belonging by engaging with a shared heritage amongst a distributed and diasporic community group. For the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai diasporic digital archives are a 'site of debate and desire', a place of aspiration that use the past (and the digital archival traces of former home societies) in order to help transform the present and the future. Thus:

the migrant archive is a continuous and conscious work of the imagination, seeking in collective memory an ethical basis for the sustainable reproduction of cultural identities in the new society. For migrants, more than for others, the archive is a map (Appadurai 2003)

It is perhaps therefore no surprise that one of the areas in the UK to see an early uptake of technologically driven community-based archiving was the communities which had experienced recent severe change and dislocation such as the rapid de-industrialization of mining, steel and textile industries in Yorkshire. The early scan and share community archive software *COMMA* and the associated network *comm@NET UK* (the United Kingdom Community Multimedia Archive Network) developed in the mid 1990s out of a local community regeneration project in Batley, West Yorkshire before spreading its use throughout the county, nationally and even internationally (Mander 2009, 32-33; *comm@NET* 2000, 16). Rural communities undergoing changes in population and tradition practices or even de-population were also the object of funded community-based digital heritage projects aiming to capture memories of the community's life and identity before they disappeared.

In addition to supposed socially inclusive outcomes relating to community cohesion and identity construction, and mirroring the association between the practice of community history in the 1970s and 1980s funded by MSC and skills training, government bodies in the UK have regularly sought to establish the positive social and economic benefits to be gained from participating in community-based archive activity, particularly digital community archiving including the acquisition of key employable ICT skills (Thomson 2008; Jura Consultants 2009). Several large scale public-funded community archive projects such as Community Archives Wales ('empowering individuals and strengthening communities in Wales, through digital community archiving') identified engaging different economically and politically disadvantaged groups with new technologies as one of their key priorities in providing funding for the activities.

Whilst acknowledging the significant demonstrable and claimed benefits that technology has brought to the process of community-based archival activity, it has also been the cause of number of concerns such as continuing digital (and broadband download) divides, the long-term sustainability of digital archives, the use of proprietary platforms and the ownership of digital community heritage. The collapse and disappearance of *comm@NET* and eventually formal support for the *Comma* software is a salutary reminder of the fragility and long-term preservation concerns of much community-based digital archival material, and the sometimes limited physical and technical resources to which many community archivists have access.

Critical reflections on our characterizations of Community-based archives

With these characterizations in mind, as well as the theme of this conference (*Nexus, Confluence, and Difference: Community Archives meets Community Informatics*) and the fact that most of us here are researchers and are contemplating our own research engagement, at this point we want to introduce a more critical dimension into this discussion. Taking a more critical stance challenges us to look at how the community archives movement and the ways in which the archival field has been theorizing it reflect on the field, and introduces some possible broader ways to frame responses to the final three question areas we set out to address in this paper.

First of all, *why are "we" (and here we are referring not only to academics in archival studies, but also to archival practitioners) so focused on formulating definitions of and making distinctions between mainstream and community archives and their endeavors?* For the most part, "we" are not the voices of, or even representing "community archives"—although that line is becoming more blurred with increased numbers of professionally-trained archivists coming from and returning to these communities. We are the ones applying the term "community archives" to these diverse social, political and cultural initiatives and we are the ones viewing their inception and flourishing as some kind of phenomenon or movement. But are they really, or is that our projection, possibly because we recognize how these initiatives address the shortcomings of our more traditional archival constructions and

practices? Many of the types of community archives that we are increasingly encountering have grown up, not just because technology now facilitates such organizing, documenting, and re/presentation of communities, but as augmenting, oppositional or counter-archives that are striving to secure a place and a voice in contemporary society and a future where what they wish to remember is remembered, and what they wish to change is changed. Such objectives are what community informatics scholars Kate Williams and Joan Durrance (2008) have identified in their work as a simultaneous focus on “transformation” and “continuity.” As such, while we may view community archives as entities certainly to be encouraged and celebrated, they are not just about a comfortable or authentic expression of heritage and identity (although some certainly aspire to be that). They are also an indictment of our failure to recognize and address those communities and their interests and perspectives in our theorizing, holdings and our practices. Read in this light, the term “community archives” then becomes at best a patronizing device and at worst, an overt othering. In our reflexive research and praxis, therefore, we must always be very cognizant of this possible construction.

A second critical question is *what is the appropriate and ethical role of archival theorizing with regard to community archives and the community archives movement?* Is it to theorize its characteristics and chronicle its development and perhaps its eventual demise? Is it to help the professional field to understand how it needs to rethink its traditional practices in order to integrate community archives and the challenges they present to the mainstream within its paradigm? Is it to reason with the field and urge it to action and a new ethic? As should become evident from the discussion of new social movement theory and also of community informatics later in this paper, it would seem that this is a legitimate question to ask in each of these contexts.

Much of the theorizing about community archives has come from scholars who are based in highly developed countries with very plural populations and complex legacies of colonialism, slavery, conquest, and settlement (e.g., the U.S., Canada, Australia and the U.K.). Although still needing to cope with digital divide concerns, their ICT infrastructure is sophisticated. These are also countries where the professional archival communities still do not proportionately reflect the plurality in the general population² and still tend to have a strong institutional and national orientation. Conditions, therefore, have been ripe for the emergence of community archives. At the same time, the professional communities in these countries have been increasingly engaged in cooperative digitization, and collaborative archival and educational initiatives with less resourced or less established partners in other regions of the world, including former colonies. *How can this theorizing be extended to contemplate the impetus, nature and possible trajectories for community archives in other regions of the world, or across diasporic or other distributed contexts?*

Finally, *how can we ensure that this theorizing is equally community-centric and does not simply import ideas that have been developed in other national, cultural and professional contexts?* And the corollary question for practice, *how should international relationships between mainstream and community archives or indeed between different community archives be negotiated and developed equitably and with appropriate cultural sensitivity?* These are fundamental questions in all relationships that involve underempowered communities, but they are especially important when high power organizations engage in helping to develop, rescue or enhance the availability of community archives or documentation in countries or jurisdictions that do not have the resources to do so on their own. To what extent are different agendas, needs, potential beneficiaries, languages and literacies contemplated in these contexts where total community-centricity and independence may not be possible or desirable? Are equitable, and mutually respectful and beneficial relationships possible when one party is largely dependent upon the other? This, of course, is an area that Indigenous

² See, for example, the Society of American Archivists, *Archival Census & Education Needs Survey in the United States*, <http://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/acensus-archival-census-education-needs-survey-in-the-united-states>.

protocols developed in countries like Australia and the US have tried to address,³ but there is a need to extend such approaches to other community contexts and other kinds of institutional-community relationships.

Last year at this conference, Anne Gilliland (2014, 20-21) introduced the Voice, Identity, Activism (VIA) Framework for community archives. The framework was developed based upon three guiding principles:

1. The interests, needs and well-being of the community are central. Robust and recognized recordkeeping and archives are as critical to the empowerment and profile development of grass-roots, identity- and issue-based, and activist communities as they have traditionally been to high-power organizations and bureaucracies such as governments, corporations, religious organizations and academic institutions, even if their manifestations may not take on the same forms as those found in more “mainstream” settings. They are, therefore, a fundamental component of social justice, civil rights, and democratic movements and have direct impact upon the lives and well-being of communities and their constituents.
2. That community records and heritage materials should not simply be approached by archives and collecting institutions that are external to the community as collectibles, “rescue” or “salvage” projects, or means to diversify or “round out” existing documentary sources. Instead, the place and meaning of community archives and their contents needs to be clearly understood in any potential archival relationship between the community and an external collecting institution and a mutually beneficial partnership approach devised.
3. That a community-centric framework for approaching archives and recordkeeping recognizes that there are important and constantly evolving community interests, epistemologies, demographics and emotions that must be addressed in recordkeeping and archives activities and that these will present challenges necessitating a re-thinking of “mainstream” archival practices as well as heightened understanding of those of the communities in question.

Since then, Gilliland has developed the complementary Culturally-Aware, Respectful and Ethical (CARE) Framework. While the VIA Framework delineates aspects of community archives that might provide a path or way forward for communities as well as outside archivists and archives who engage with them, viewed from the community out, the CARE Framework looks at the interests, motivations and challenges of multiple communities working together in an archival endeavor that crosses institutional, community, cultural or national boundaries. Such collaboration is happening now more than ever, and two of the prime facilitators are digital information and communications technology, and metadata. CARE emphasizes global stewardship and works from the mainstream archive in, as opposed to the community and its archive out. Both VIA and CARE are efforts to address the “we” problem mentioned above.

How do community archives and their priorities evolve over time?

Do community archives place their emphasis on their role in the present or are they consistently conscious of their value to posterity? The presentist temporal orientation of many community archives that are geared toward action in the present and transformation of the status quo is an aspect that those theorizing as well as working with community archives find challenging. Archival professionals and academics often see an incommensurable tension between directly addressing the immediate and short-term needs and goals of a community through archival activities, and the fundamentally long-term accountability and preservation

³ See, for example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) *Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/protocols.php>; and the *First Archivist Circle Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>.

role of sustainable archives as they traditionally conceptualized and operationalized. The notion that entities that create documentation, whether they be organizations or movements or even archives, move through some sort of life pattern is not anything that is beyond the scope of mainstream archival ideas to accommodate. After all, institutional archives are in the business of selectively keeping the records of their own institution when they are no longer actively needed and collecting archives are full of the records of defunct groups and organizations. However, this traditional paradigm is based around the death of the record, and archives are “where records go to die” (to paraphrase Australian archivist Glenda Acland (1992)), not around keeping the organic relationship between a community and its archives vital and central to community well-being.

In the traditional archival paradigm, the materials and their well-being lie at the center of a set of professional “disinterested” processes. It is the notion of community groups and movements setting up their own archives – and operating them according to a living archives paradigm, with staffing that may rely heavily or exclusively on the vision or authority of a single individual or on dedicated volunteers – that is one source of tension for traditional archivists who might see such an orientation as antithetical to the long-term orientation that they associate with the concept of “archive.” “Disinterestedness” is tied to professional, but increasingly challenged ideals of neutrality and objectivity-- archivists are worried about how an explicit action or community agenda-orientation might jeopardize their documentary and long-term roles, not to mention the societal trust that is placed in them (Flinn & Shepherd 2011). Given that many community archives have a major, if not totally digital presence, some of this mainstream archival anxiety may also come from worries about post-custodial approaches being implemented in a situation where few archival controls may be in place.

Archival scholars such as Andrew Flinn and Rebecka Sheffield have posited, based on their research, that community archives move through a fairly predictable cycle where, as a community, movement or group matures, declines, or becomes no longer as socially relevant, it finds that it can no longer sustain or no longer wishes to sustain its archives as an independent, autonomous activity. That is often the point when a hand-off occurs to a mainstream archive. For a mainstream archive, taking on a declining/distressed community archive means also taking on what may well be a new, different, and generationally or ideologically stratified population of donors, activists with a distrust of such institutions, and intra- and inter-community political divisions. This will require a pluralized orientation to the management, description and dissemination of community archive materials; negotiation of new policies and potentially also the development of community protocols; and considerable sensitivity. In light of this, professional skills and ethics may need to be recalibrated. Professional archivists working with community archives also have to acknowledge that they are not the only relevant authorities and that professional archival skills and community knowledge and expertise will play different, but still key roles. Eventually, however, the “living” community-centric nature of the community archive will likely die if it is subsumed into a mainstream archive (although, as discussed below, some hybrid mainstream-community archives approaches are being attempted and it is not yet apparent whether these will be effective in maintaining the “living” aspects of the archives in the long-term).

Sheffield’s (n.d.) work in particular, which looks at LGBT community archives in Canada and the U.S., is examining the relevance of new social movement theory as a framework for understanding what might be happening in these endeavors. According to Stephen Buechler (1995, 442), new social movement theory looks to “logics of action based in politics, ideology, and culture as the root of much collective action, and ... to other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity.” Reviewing work in the field, Buechler (1995, 441-464) identifies several characteristics of new social movement theory that have been emphasized by different theorists, among them that:

- It underscores symbolic action in civil society or the cultural sphere as a major arena for collective action alongside instrumental action in the state or political sphere;

- It stresses the importance of processes that promote autonomy and self-determination instead of strategies for maximizing influence and power;
- It emphasizes the role of post-material values in much contemporary collective action, as opposed to conflicts over material resources;
- It tends to problematize the often fragile process of constructing collective identities and identifying group interests, instead of assuming that conflict groups and their interests are structurally determined;
- It stresses the socially constructed nature of grievances and ideology, rather than assuming that they can be deduced from a group's structural location;
- It recognizes a variety of submerged, latent, and temporary networks that often undergird collective action, rather than assuming that centralized organizational forms are prerequisites for successful mobilization;
- All versions of new social movement theory operate with some model of a societal totality that provides the context for the emergence of collective action (e.g., postindustrial society, the information society, advanced capitalism), but the attempt to theorize an historically specific social formation as the backdrop for contemporary forms of collective action is perhaps the most distinctive feature of new social movement theories.

Similar themes have been identified by archival scholars who have been theorizing about the nature of community archives (Flinn, Stevens, Shepherd 2009; Flinn 2011; Bastian and Anderson 2009). In particular, they resonate with the emphasis on autonomy and self-determination that, as already mentioned, are hallmarks of most community archives – at least at their inception. The mix of the cultural with the political sphere is another frequent characteristic of community archives and the placement of these movements within an intellectual construction such as “the information society” seems very familiar. Archives are an important mechanism for supporting the construction as well as the complexification and problematization of community identity. They can also expose and document the range of community interests (depending upon how open the archive/the community might be to exposing such diversity within the community). Archives are all about contextualization and can reveal/provide insights on dynamics, players, events, etc. over time that have been instrumental in what has happened to and within the community. They are also capable of revealing or documenting social networks and patterns and making it possible to trace the outcomes thereof. A major difference, however, is that new social movement theory has an historical perspective that aligns it with more traditional and mainstream archives, but, as Sheffield (n.d.) notes, community archives tend to have a forward trajectory rather than historical orientation.

What kinds of community, institutional and professional relationships form around community archiving? To what extent and when are they based in mutuality and equity or are they formed out of necessity?

When the community, rather than a specific organizational entity, is the locus of the archives, the boundaries of activity, responsibility and relationships can be both fuzzy and fluid, and, not unlike a community itself, they require constant redefinition as the community evolves. Both Bastian (2003, 5) and Ketelaar (2005, 44) have drawn attention to the complexities of the inter-relationships between a community, its records, its identity, and its embeddedness in a common past and between actions, records and recordkeeping conventions in documenting the activities and forming the memory of the community. However, anyone wishing to understand the relationships that are at work, whether they be situated within or external to the community, may need to look first to scholars of these communities for assistance in identifying the composition of the community, the markers of shifting community boundaries and of community evolution, and how a community's archival legacy

might be spread across both community and mainstream archives. For example, Vietnamese American studies scholar, Linda Trinh Võ (2002) has argued that because of such fluidity, “conventional notions of community, of ethnic enclaves determined by exclusion and ghettoization, now have limited use in explaining the dynamic processes of contemporary community formation ... the concept of community [has been expanded] to include sites not necessarily bounded by space; formations around gender, class, sexuality, and generation reveal new processes as well as the demographic diversity of today's Asian American population ... [there is a] need for new analytic approaches to account for the similarities and differences between them.” Scholars such as Võ work within the community, using and building archival resources, but it is often not enough. Võ (2004, 5), who examined the mobilization of an Asian American community in San Diego, California, drew heavily on community resources but at the same time lamented the scarcity of documentation. Another example is Chamorro scholar Keith Camacho (2011), who, working within the Los Angeles area Pacific Islander community as well as across the Pacific Islands, draws upon and cross-references not only community records but also government and military records in his ethnographic and historical studies of colonization, decolonization and militarization in the Pacific Islands region.

Relationships exist both within and between communities and their archives. Both Võ and Camacho are examples of *intra-community relationships*, in that they are both scholars who come from the communities that they are studying, and upon whose documentation they rely. Of course, not all academics who study communities come from inside those communities, and anthropology, ethnomusicology, public health and urban planning archives, to name but a few, are replete with documentation of and sometimes even by communities that have been studied. New technologies and practices such as digitization, digital reversioning, and digital repatriation have opened up opportunities for important new forms of dialog and *relationships between academic and research archives and community archives and their members*. Another kind of *academic-community relationship* that has been growing in recent years between universities and community organizations and their archives has been the placement of professional students such as students of archival studies in these settings for service learning purposes. Students can augment the available expertise and staffing in the archive, while gaining embedded experience in an alternative archival setting (Lau, Gilliland & Anderson 2012). *Inter-community relationships*, in addition to being important solidarity mechanisms, are also used for mutually beneficial community leveraging. In the United States, and particularly on the west coast, many examples of pan-Asian-American community archives and heritage initiatives can be identified.⁴

Ultimately, however, most community archives are resource poor. Some may accept government funding, for example, direct government support such as that of the Korean Democracy Foundation Archives in Seoul, or as beneficiaries of the UK Heritage Lottery Fund. As previously noted others may refuse any financial support from those outside their own community or even, as in the case of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York, decline to file for not-for-profit status because of the ways in which such status circumscribes political activism. As already discussed, many resource-strapped community archives, or community archives that have seen their original cause or motivation either largely met or in decline, may approach a mainstream archives about subsuming their holdings. Recently some alternative or more hybrid approaches have been tried, however. In October 2010, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives entered into an agreement with the University of Southern California (USC) Libraries that the Libraries would take over its archives—the largest and one of the oldest LGBT collections in the United States. In a semi-custodial model, USC has primarily left the archives *in situ*, but its staff members now have USC personnel status and financial and technological resources are supplied by USC.⁵ The June Mazer Lesbian

⁴ For example, see Visual Communications in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, <http://www.vconline.org/alpha/cms/default/index.cfm/about-us/mission-history/>; and Seattle's International District Preservation Movement, http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/aa_preservation.htm.

⁵ <http://www.onearchives.org/> and <http://one.usc.edu/>.

Archives of Los Angeles and Southern California remains located in West Hollywood, albeit with limited public hours, but has entered into a novel agreement with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)'s Library, whereby UCLA has been helping the Mazer to process, digitize, and provide online access to its holdings.⁶ One final example is the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), a virtual national not-for-profit community archive working out of Philadelphia and Los Angeles which is digitizing and digitally sharing institutional, community and personal materials and making them more available across South Asian communities.⁷

How might a closer proximity between community informatics and community archiving benefit each field?

Based on our review, we see several aspects that both community informatics and community archives hold in common: community centricity, active support for social activism on the one hand and proactive social responsibility on the other, praxis and theoretical components, diverse locations/sites within a community, addressing multiple media and technologies, sensitivity to the difficulties in drawing boundaries around a "community," sensitivity to the diversity and hierarchies that exist within a community, and similar challenges with regard to participatory research and institutional partnerships. Williams and Durrance's 2010 articulation of community informatics as a field identifies four points that have community archives correlates that suggest work that needs to be done and intriguing possibilities for new research:

1. A preoccupation with the Digital Divide.
Correlate: Archivists have been preoccupied with the divide between community and mainstream archives and associated power inequities.
2. Numerous case studies by academic and policy researchers are providing data upon which community technology and sustainability mechanisms on a local and global basis could be developed.
Correlate: Archival scholars have been developing rich case studies for a shorter time period but have yet to coordinate their work systematically in order to understand issues such as the utility, feasibility and appropriateness of the methods and approaches used, to compare and contrast the data yielded, or to support the development of community technology and sustainability mechanisms on a local or global basis.
3. Community informatics researchers are increasingly turning to theorizing, and this work is beginning to be recognized on a par with other areas of research within the information field.
Correlate: Archival scholars have tended to focus more on theorizing (e.g., what is an archive? What is a record? How can trust be established in a community archive? What is that status of "archival neutrality"?) than on development aspects. Theorizing is highly respected and valued in the archival field. Community-based archiving is regarded as an important new area of research for archival studies.
4. The expansion of community informatics and community informatics in the curricula of library and information science schools.
Correlate: Similar expansion regarding community archives in the curricula of archival studies programs.

Finally, therefore, we see five aspects at least that might benefit by bringing the two fields into closer proximity. Firstly, each field will benefit from understanding and taking short, medium and long-term views. Community informatics tends to be more focused on immediate and medium-term issues and needs, and archival studies identifies perhaps different medium-term issues and needs, and always has the long-term view in mind.

⁶ <http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/>.

⁷ <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/>.

Secondly, theoretical findings and community insights may well be of mutual value and/or be transferrable. Thirdly, community informatics could be broadened to contemplate aspects of information creation, circulation and power that are not just those associated with information technology (IT) and its implementations, while community archives could engage more robustly in the development of community-centric IT tools and services. Fourthly, community informatics could use community archives as a research resource, especially when longitudinal or attitudinal (e.g., from oral histories, tweets, etc.) data is necessary. Fifthly, community informatics and community archives researchers could work together to elucidate the role of memory within community organization, health, recovery, behaviors, responses and motivations.

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