

Sound Archives: Appraisal, Cataloguing, Textual Documentation Issues December 8, 1998 by Robert Pruter

Introduction

The genesis of this paper stems from certain issues regarding sound archives that were raised in a 1997 article called "Appraisal of Sound Recordings for Textual Archivists," by Christopher Ann Paton, Archivist of the Popular Music Collection of the Special Collections Department of Georgia State University's Pullen Library.¹ The article has a lot of virtues, where it serves terrifically as a basic introduction for textual archivists, who might be in the position of appraising sound recordings, a field completely alien to many of them. Paton provides a comprehensive overview of the types of sound recordings and in describing their nature and their value as archival material. She lists eight types of sound recordings, as follows: (1) commercial recordings, (2) recordings of events, (3) dictation recordings, (4) field recordings, (5) musical, theatrical, and artistic works, (6) broadcast industry recordings, (7) home recordings, and (8) oral histories.² She also describes the various forms of sound recordings, as follows: (1) Grooved phonodiscs, with subcategories as acetates and dictation discs. Paton neglects to mention test pressings.

(2) Magnetic tape, with such categories as reel-to-reel, cassette, eight-track, digital audiocassettes.³

Paton does not mention CDs because at the time of her essay she did not believe they were being commonly offered to archives.⁴ This surely may be changing, as corporate sound archives in particular must save CDs especially if they are record companies. Private repositories are also collecting CDs as well.⁵

To keep the scope of the subject narrow and focused, this paper will primarily concern itself with commercial sound recordings, primarily recorded grooved discs, although other kinds of sound recordings will be discussed as well as certain paper-based materials that are also found in sound archives. While Paton's broad overview of archival sound recordings is valuable and seemingly complete, this writer feels she neglected or overlooked aspects of sound recordings research, notably related to commercial sound recordings, that both neophyte and experienced sound archivists should be familiar with. Those issues have to do with appraisal and the need of outside expertise, the necessity of item level cataloguing, and the importance of sound recordings as textual documents as well as sound documents. In discussing these issues, this paper will review some of the relevant literature, report on views of some archivists, and finally report on views of some researchers on how they use sound archives with respect to the issues that were discussed.

Not included in this paper is a lengthy discussion of preservation issues as such, but the subject will be covered tangentially as related to other issues. The cost and labor-intensive considerations of preservation are well-known, and this researcher is aware of the efforts archives have been making to preserve their collections. There is an extensive literature on preservation that I have consulted, and to cover all the various aspects of preservation would make this paper unwieldy.⁶

Appraisal and Outside Expertise

Paton along with Ellen Garrison, archivist of the Middle Tennessee State University sound archives, practically alone have been writing and reporting on sound archival issues in the archival field. Their work has been invaluable in calling attention to and educating the archival

community on sound archives, which present their own special problems.

Well before her appraisal article, Paton wrote a highly astute article in 1990 for the *American Archivist* where she describes the paper-based archivists and the sound archivists as existing in two separate camps.⁷ This division she explains has resulted in a deep lack of interest by paper-based archivists in sound recordings, reflected by the dearth of literature on the subject in archival publications and their obvious disinterest in accessioning sound collections.⁸ The explanation for this state of affairs according to Paton is that for paper-based archivists sound recordings present technological problems on playback equipment, peculiar preservation and storage problems, and lack authoritative widely accepted standards for cataloguing.⁹ Paton mentions "problems with appraisal" in sound recordings, she does not get specific.¹⁰ It may be that another reason paper-based archivists show a lack of interest in sound collections is that they may not feel comfortable with their ability to appraise what is essentially an unfamiliar medium to them.

The following year, Paton continuing her work in trying to bridge the gap between the paper-base and sound archive camps, contributed an annotated bibliography on sound archives that was published in the *Midwestern Archivist*, an issue devoted to sound archives.¹¹

In her 1997 article, Paton again makes her audience focus the paper-base archivist community, and the guidance she provides is specifically directed to that community. She thus asserts that "by reviewing the formats and types of recordings that are most offered to archives and taking some time to review the most salient points of audio appraisal literature, most textual archivists should be able to do a respectable job of appraising most of the sound recordings that come their way."¹² This observer is skeptical on that point.

The key qualification in Paton's assertion is "most." Granted, most collections that come to paper-base archivists can be appraised with minimal background, but Paton never answers the question of how an archivist knows when something comes his or her way that is of historical worth and is worth including in a collection? How does an archivist know when they are not in the position to suitably appraise a sound collection? How would an archivist know when a collection contains invaluable discs that serve to document the recording industry? The material available to a typical textual archivist that provides guidance on collection content appears to be insufficient for those occasions that valuable sound recordings may come in.

In the field of popular music, the area is exceedingly splintered with regard to expertise, because it is so genre-driven in terms of collecting and research. Thus there are experts on blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, country, and ethnic recordings and few of them know anything with respect to records that are beyond their scope of interest. How then would even a novice archivist know what was or what was not important to keep? One cannot judge by form. One collection of 1,000 78s might be virtually worthless, but another may contain dozens of extremely rare recordings.

Yet Paton in her essay only calls for an expert to appraise condition and quality in terms of sound. She makes no mention of an expert who could appraise the collection in terms of historical importance.¹³ That is a mistake. Surely an archivist, even an experienced one, might not need to refer to an expert to judge the collection or parts of the collection for historical worthiness? Paton clarifies this point in correspondence, "Yes, one may, and sometimes should, ask advice of experienced researchers or collectors." She correctly adds that, "their advice has to be folded into all the other factors that lead to a final decision. Knowing that an item is rare and valuable is good; weighing that value against relevance to the collecting policy, potential use, the likelihood that the institution can provide appropriate care, etc., will lead to an appropriate

answer, and if the answer is 'no,' the donor or item can perhaps be referred to a better home."¹⁴

By adding a qualification to the above, Paton perhaps shows a bit of leeriness regarding the subject of outside experts. The archival field is notorious for its distrust of subject experts. This point of view is reflected in the sound archives guidelines written by Helen P. Harrison in a 1987 report by the United Nations' Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP). In it she asserted that "All too frequently people eminent in their own fields want everything kept. Selection should thus be done by the archivist and not by outsiders with peccadilloes and sectional interests."¹⁵ She notes that record collectors are "subjective" in their selection policy, while archivists must be "objective" in their collection appraisal and selection.¹⁶

If we accept that archivists should not rely on outside experts or to distrust their appraisal skills then it is incumbent on the archivists to be familiar with the field that they collect. Paton comments in her correspondence to the author, "For archives that deal mostly or much with music, it is absolutely necessary for all archivists to become educated in the disciplines and areas that relate to their collections, and I did not mean to imply that outside assistance should not be sought when necessary. My concern was primarily with the non-music archives, who these days are being offered everything from faculty members' collections of opera, hula, or jazz recordings (on 78s or LPs as their collections switch to CD) to sometimes vast collections of non-commercial recordings that are difficult to handle and therefore problematic."¹⁷

Harrison emphasized that "any archivist should have a thorough knowledge of the subject in order to formulate and implement selection policies. He should be qualified in the subject he is dealing with in order to recognize the true from the false, the genuine from the spurious, relevant subject content and intrinsic value in the particular subject area."¹⁸

Harrison's emphatic views that archivists are the only people who should be making accession decisions would engender more confidence in this reader if she had not also written in her guidelines the following: "It may be argued that popular music may be of ephemeral interest and only a representative sample should be kept. Certain genres, such as folk music, may once have been a despised section of the recorded output, but now it and ethnic music are studied all over the world. The challenge to the appraiser is how to predict which of the ephemeral material of today will become either the research material of tomorrow or indeed remain ephemeral."¹⁹

Even positing what is or what is not ephemeral in sound recordings in terms of genre content may be the wrong equation that an sound archivist should consider in accessioning. Popular music as a cultural manifestation is by its very nature ephemeral, but as with any cultural manifestation it serves as a reflection of society at large at a particular time. The sound archivist's equation must be in terms of whether or not a particular collection is appropriate for its collection of country and western, rhythm and blues, jazz, or whatever, not whether or not it is ephemeral or not. That Harrison seems unaware in the late 1980s that popular music is indeed already a genuine area of scholarly research gives one pause.

If indeed as Paton says an experienced archivist should in certain situations ask advice of experienced researchers or collectors, and should have a certain knowledge of the field, the question returns to how then can a novice textual archivist make the proper appraisal decisions on sound recordings based on reading the appropriate literature?

This observer--from an admittedly limited survey of the archival publication on sound collections--does not believe that the literature provides a sufficient level of content background to properly guide novice archivists as to the worthiness of their collection. That is, the archivist must possess a degree of knowledge on sound materials, particularly commercial recordings, that has been not been sufficiently conveyed in the literature. I have some suggested considerations

that a textual archivist might consider in appraising the historical content of a collection:

1. *How old is the collection?* Does it include many LPs and 45s from recent decades? If so, the material has the probability of being fairly common. Or is the collection a large number of 78s from the 1920s and 1930s? If so, then perhaps some outside judgement is needed, since the material may be completely unfamiliar to the textual archivist.

2. *What is the subject area of the collection?* If it is common popular and classical music, and it is newer material, there is probably of little historical interest there. But if it covers a certain small byway--such as early bebop jazz, R&B vocal harmony (doowop) recordings, or 1920s hillbilly recordings, and the archivist has little idea what he or she is looking at, then again outside advice most likely will be needed.

3. *What record labels are collected?* The likelihood of obtaining historical significant recordings that are not found in other collections increases dramatically when the recordings have been done on small independent labels rather than on the large major labels. While the majors pressed up hundreds of thousands records, even millions, for a mass audience, the independents tended to record for much smaller niche markets, such as rhythm and blues, country and western, and ethnic. Some independent labels were poorly capitalized and they may have pressed up very few copies, records that may be significant and rare.

4. *How is the collection relevant to your holdings?* This consideration has the possibility of trumping all the above? If say your area is African-American history, and there is a considerable interest in the building collections on cultural achievements in that area, then perhaps a more recent major label and common popular black-oriented music such as disco may be appraised as necessary for your collection development. If there is no relevance to your collection, then the donor must be referred elsewhere.

Paton notes that reappraisal and considerations of cost loom much larger among sound archivists than among textual archivists. She makes the salient point that the "vast majority of the archives can afford to save only a relatively small percentage of the recordings they have already accessioned," so adding to a collection with all the expense and upkeep involved is an important consideration.²⁰ She suggests that because of the advent of the CD many archives are having dumped on them old 78s, 45s, and LPs that are of little value and of little historical worth.²¹ Her views are seconded in the literature. For example, Mildred Petrie, founder of the Sarasota Music Archive in Sarasota, Florida, says, "No matter how much they are treasured by collectors, at least six of every ten records are duplicates when delivered to us. We keep the best for our archival collection, a few for our working collection, and grieve--as do the collectors--when we must dispose of them."²²

Archives that do not have the resources to process accessions in a reasonable length of time have no business adding a sound collection. One notable record collector, Gary Thalheimer, said in 1995, "More recently, I discovered that many archives tend to become 'black holes,' into which material disappears until they have sufficient funds to catalogue."²³

Item Level Cataloguing

Almost universally sound archivists agree that researchers expect item level access to sound materials, and it is incumbent on archivist cataloguers to give it to them. But as David H. Thomas, archivist/cataloger at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, explains in his 1990 article, "Cataloging Sound Recordings Using Archival Methods," the tradition of item level cataloging is fundamentally opposed to archival tradition. That tradition "seeks to unite intellectual entities made up of many physical fragments" into larger units, such as "correspondence" or "financial records," organized in series, boxes, and files.²⁴ Thomas in his

essay contends that the archivist must "devise a hybrid method that will respect both traditions simultaneously."²⁵

Thomas tackles several issues, one of which is the issue of organization and arrangement. He notes that while archivists attempt to keep the original integrity of order in a collection as a basis of its arrangement, this would not make sense with a sound collection. He says "arranging a sound recordings collection in chronological order or alphabetically by title is common, as is arranging a collection based on subject content." Rodgers and Hammerstein (R & H) cataloguers also separate commercial and noncommercial recordings.²⁶

The finding aid is the central tool developed by archivists for describing a collection and locating items in it. Most researchers can browse paper-based materials they obtain through finding aids, but sound recordings according to Thomas are not "browsable," in that they are weighty and bulky and often needed to be heard. Bringing out 200 LPs as opposed to folders containing 200 letters pose different situations. Therefore, he says because finding aids by default become the only method of access, the "finding aid for archival sound recordings should be as detailed as possible." He adds that finding aids at R & H are at item level.²⁷

Thomas also explains that sound recordings can be evaluated like textual archives in terms of provenance, whether the material is published or noncommercial, and whether the material contains contextual value. Collections that fulfill these criteria then can be treated as an archival entity. He says, "chronological, alphabetical, and subject-based arrangements work well for sound recordings, just as they do for textual recordings."²⁸ Thomas provides guidance on how to create AMC MARC records for sound materials treating them archivally with specific adaptations that apply to sound as opposed to paper-based description.²⁹ For example, the statement of physical extent in MARC field 300 cannot refer to linear or cubic feet but to the number of items. He also says further description of subsets is necessary, such as subsets for tapes, phonograph records, and video tapes.³⁰ The AMC MARC record will refer the researcher also to the item-level finding aids.

Thomas concludes that the sound recordings cataloguer must blend two opposing cataloguing practices--library practice that provides access to specific works or items and archival practice that provides information that shows relationship between specific works or items.³¹

Ellen Garrison, archivist of the Center For Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University, discusses bibliographic control of sound archives using her archives as a case study. She first notes that traditional library bibliographic control methods have been inadequate, particularly with various forms of popular music. The Center's archive belongs to SOLINET, the regional affiliate of OCLC, and Garrison emphasizes that the Center for that reason selected library cataloguing, using the USMARC format for music, so that the collection could be placed on the Internet.³²

But there were problems. One of the reasons the Center chose SOLINET was that it felt that SOLINET could use the OCLC database as the basis for cataloguing the Center's own collection to keep expenses down and eliminate duplication of effort. The Center's popular music collection, however, posed a problem when SOLINET got a hit rate--the percentage of the Center's discs that appeared on the OCLC database--at 70 percent for LPs (cost per item to catalogue at \$3.49) but only at five percent for 45s (cost per item, \$5.13). The Center opted to have its approximately 6,000 LP collection only to be catalogued by SOLINET. The Center also found the USMARC format unsatisfactory and OCLC quality control poor, as most cataloguers in the system were more attune to classical than popular music.³³

By the time the Center's 6,000 LPs had been catalogued, its long play collection had grown to 20,000 discs, and funding had run out. The Center decided on an alternative to bibliographic control, and decided to use a USMARC-based database software package to provide a hierarchical system of description. The Center entered collective description of significant series or groups of 78s, special collection scores, or sheet music into OCLC and made reference therein to the item-level indexes available in the repository.³⁴ By this process of practical trial and error, the Center reached a blend of access modes that Thomas recommends. Garrison says, "The Center's decision to use this hierarchical system of complementary USMARC and non-USMARC finding aids for several types of published materials was primarily pragmatic, based on the unsuitability of OCLC cataloging for some Center materials and users."³⁵

The title of Garrison's article, "neither fish nor fowl nor good red meat," refers to her belief that sound archives present a distinctive problem in which no catalogue format fits them perfectly. She concludes, "combining the archival control option in a bibliographic utility with in-house, item-level indexes would make the best use of limited financial and personnel resources and best serve the needs of users."³⁶

Taking a look at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra archives, the archivist there, Brenda Nelson-Strauss, clearly feels that there is need for item-level access. While the CSO Archives does not actually catalogue its commercial record holdings at the item level, the archives maintains two databases--one for the CSO commercial recordings discography and the other for CSO broadcast tapes. Both are arranged chronologically and alphabetical by composer. Notes Nelson-Strauss, "The database has worked just fine for us, and we can find any recording we need by going to the discographies without taking the time to actually catalog them in the normal fashion."³⁷

The Archives plans eventually to "manipulate the database" to actually create a catalogue listing for every recording. Nelson-Strauss notes that there is no current way to search the database by record number. Despite this failing, Nelson-Strauss notes that "we have many users that are record fans, and they have all these numbers memorized, so it's not really a problem. If we need to know a particular record number, or conductor, or soloist, we can check our Word document. We've had so many other things to get control of that we felt the discography approach is really just find."³⁸

On the shelf the records are listed "chronologically, sort of," admits Nelson-Strauss. She explains, "when you start with the 78s through the LPs they are roughly chronological. After the LPs they are in record company order. The unique system is the work of a volunteer who started organizing the collection around 1984. "The shelf organization is his," she says, "but it is very easy to find things, and we haven't really tinkered with it."³⁹

Clearly the CSO Archive recognizes the importance and need of an item-level reference tool, and maintains one by a discography on a database. A discography is only useful for the type of narrow collection of the CSO, which consists exclusively of only one artist basically, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. When an Archive has a complete discography of exclusively one artist then that discography can serve as a substitute catalogue.

The Chicago Jazz Archive (CJA), located in the Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, was founded in 1976 for the purpose of collecting and preserving materials from the 1910s through the 1920s that document the birth of "Chicago Style" jazz. The archive, which has only been open the last two years after Curator Deborah L. Gillaspie was hired, has since expanded its mission to collect all eras up to the present day relating to Chicago jazz. The

archive holdings include oral histories; sound recordings of 78s, 45s, and CDs; audio and video tapes, printed arrangements, piano sheet music, correspondence, scrapbooks, photographs, books, periodicals, artwork, and other jazz-related materials.⁴⁰

The policy of the archives is to provide finding aids on an item level for every one of its collections. And as the finding aids are created they are put on the CJA Website. However, the archive has only created finding aids for a small part of the collection as this time. The curator is a part-time 20-hour-a-week position and she is assisted by a 5-hour-a-week student intern. Consequently the archives is only open on Tuesdays, and visits are only made by appointment. To give an idea of its limited services, in 1997 the CJA handled 62 visits and 230 reference questions by email. Most of the queries come from researchers on the East Coast and Europe. Most of the Chicago area researchers are students doing research papers and genealogists tracking down family members who were reputed to have been a part of the city's jazz community.⁴¹

At this point the work on creating item-level finding aids is concentrated on collections with predominantly textual materials and illustrative materials. Explains Gillaspie, "The phonograph records are already entered into our database, so we have access to individual titles that way. Given our limited resources we feel the paper-base materials in our collection has to be done first. Eventually we'll create finding aids for the sound recordings as well. Also what is holding us up is the technology. To put it on OCLC, as we plan to do, requires us to put the collection in MARC record format. Our current software provides only a simple database."⁴²

The CJA, curiously, in its finding aids list the phonograph records by donor, but on the shelf the pre-CD phonograph records are listed by label and then by number. (The CDs, not in specific donor collections, are shelved with the University of Chicago library collection.) The individual records are then labeled with the donor names.⁴³ In any case, the Chicago Jazz Archives not only has the practice of item-level access to its sound archives it has extended that practice to its paper-based collections.

Textual Documentation

Throughout her 1997 essay, Paton seems oblivious to the notion that a record might be an enduring textual document. But historians of the various popular music genres use sound recordings not only for the documentation of particular performances, but to document textual elements of the recordings to build a history of a recording artist and recording industry.

Most archives merely by the system of storage for phonograph discs recognize there is a textual documentation aspect of the collection, when they organize the collection by label and each label by issue number. Elwood A. McKee, writing in 1996 for *ARSC Journal*, says, "Extensive experience with large institutional and private collections indicates that some form of label-name/issue number order is the most widely used [method] for shelving collections."⁴⁴ Ted Sheldon, a librarian with the University of Missouri-Kansas City, notes this procedure when he said, "A commonly repeated opinion of some librarians is that they cannot resist a numbered series."⁴⁵ Sheldon then raises a cost and storage issue, "If the decision has been made to collect all recordings in a series (e.g. by label) is the archive prepared to add relatively insignificant items along with others having great significance?"⁴⁶

While Sheldon rhetorically questions whether an entire series has significant merit, there are two solid reasons why archivist should collect a numbered series, its historical value and its discographical value. A numbered series can provide a chronology that shows the whole history of the recorded output of a label over time, whether it be 78s, 45s, or LPs. A numbered series for singles (78s and 45s), in particular, can provide a discographer a solid look at the recording

history of the company, which is particularly important when dealing with small companies that have disappeared and left no company recording session documentation. It is the situation where the whole may be greater than the parts. It may be impractical to collect an entire series of a major label, such as RCA or Columbia, but for a small independent label the approach often makes sense.

Most of the major label recording sessions have been made available to researchers in published discographies, but even these can be incorrect and access to the original records is often necessary. The published discographies have always had problems with incorrect data, much of it drawn from record companies files, and the situation may be getting worse. Tim Brooks commenting in 1996 says, "As computers move us into the next generation of discography, and past work is incorporated into ever larger databases, unsourced and sometimes questionable data is infecting discography like a computer virus."⁴⁷ Brooks notes "questionable" entries in the "bible" of prewar jazz discography, Brian Rust's *Jazz Records* and other published discographies.⁴⁸

The value of discographical research and its relationship to archives has been recognized a long time. In the *Library Trends* special issue devoted to sound archival issues in July 1972 there is an entire essay, by Gordon Stevenson, devoted to the value and purpose of discographies. He provides an excellent definition of discography, saying it is "the documentation of all types of reproduced sound preserved on all types of artifacts."⁴⁹ Stevenson understands the importance of discographies in scholarly research, when he comments, "Like the book and the printed word, the artifacts of recorded sound are mirrors of past decades, products of specific times, places, cultures, and sub-cultures. They are historical sources, but they have their own history, for they are part of the history of the very society which they document."⁵⁰

Imagine if you will an archives gets a hold of a cracked unplayable 78 from a small independent label. Let's say the song is already available on a current CD. Perhaps making unfair assumptions, but going by the guidelines established in Paton's 1997 appraisal essay, this 78 is a disposable. But popular music historians look at the disc as a piece of evidence that can build their history by the information contained on the record, especially on small labels that has minimal internal office documentation. The 78 most likely will contain most of the following:

1. *Release number*: Once a matrix of all the known releases (and they are still aren't all known) on the particular label is created one has a good idea to the year and approximate month of issue.

2. *Matrix or master numbers*: Each side will contain a matrix number, on the label and scratched in the shellac, which will tell the historian what session the song came from, and if a matrix (table) is created, the approximate month of recording. Some master numbers also have prefixes that indicate what recording studio was used.

3. *Song title*: This is surprisingly not always easy to obtain, especially on rare records. Changes in the title frequently changes from the time it is listed at the time of recording to when the label is printed up.

4. *Songwriter*: The phonograph record is often the only place to find the name of the composer or songwriter. Of course, the name on the label is often a pseudonym for the actual songwriter, but if the real name for the pseudonym is known such practices will be better documented researching the labels.

5. *Publisher*: In vernacular music recordings, publishers generally last longer than record labels. A publisher's name will often open up new avenues of research for a music historian.

6. *Arranger and producer*: Record labels provide this information where company files

are silent.

7. *Artist*: This information is not always obvious. Often the name of the artist becomes a pseudonym on the label, and this is not discovered until the actual record is found.

8. *Dating codes*: RCA records can be dated by a matrix number code that will give the exact month of release. Some other records can be dated by so-called "delta numbers" scratched in the plastic or shellac. These delta numbers come from certain West Coast pressing plants, and collectors have developed a matrix for them where they can determine month by month when a record was pressed.⁵¹

There is thus a wealth of textual documentation on a record label that can significantly help the researcher to build a chronological history of an artist's recording career, from what performances were recorded at what sessions, when and where, and in what studio. The researcher can find out from whom the performer obtained their repertoire and what arrangers and producers assisted in the recordings, and when they were released. Recording company histories would be impossible to imagine without access to record label documentation.

Paton obviously could not go into this sort of detailed explanation of value of sound recordings in her appraisal article, but nevertheless she seemed to show no basic awareness that a sound document is in fact a textual document as well. For example, she suggests "prompt reformatting" for old and vulnerable media, which might include 78s, but nowhere does she suggest that along with the reformatting that the textual aspects be transcribed to the new medium.⁵²

This researcher directly asked Paton in subsequent correspondence about the textual value of phonograph discs, and her response suggests that she minimalizes its importance. She writes, "Yes, absolutely, *labels can provide particular and valuable information aside from sound quality, but that information will usually only be usable and helpful in specialized circumstances*. I am sure that all the major sound archives are aware of this and take it into account when making appraisal decisions. But for the average manuscript collection, or government record repository, the likelihood of such a situation arising is slim, and perhaps that helps account for the lack of information regarding this aspect of appraisal" (my emphasis).⁵³

Here Paton is specifically writing in reference to textual archivists who may be confronted with a sound collection donation, but her argument is still not compelling. From the antidotal evidence gathered from a few researchers in this paper by this researcher, from whom we will hear from later, the use of records for textual data is not only not a "specialized" circumstance it is a common circumstance.

Textual documentation of sound recordings thus is neither a trivial nor a specialized activity. It is essential for the kind of information scholars need for the broader research. Some scholars "merely" compile discographies, but it is the discographies in turn that provide the chronology of a performers entire recording career or a chronology of an output of a record company. This is basic information that music historians need when writing biographies, record company histories, or even deeper studies that show the historical, cultural, and sociological significance of a particular musical art form.

Matrix Numbers In Sound Archival Research

Sound archivists will perhaps discover that one of the most arcane elements of sound recording research is the pursuit of the matrix number. This number, also called master number, is the designation that recording companies assign to a recorded performance when they master a record. Thus each recorded performance will have either a number code or alphanumeric code that will follow it through history. A matrix number is thus one of the key building blocks of

recording history. These numbers appear on liner notes, on labels, and scratched in the vinyl and shellac.

Matrix numbers serve as the central organizing principal of published discographies, which list each artist alphabetically and under each artist lists recording sessions chronologically. For most of the history of the recording industry, the standard recording session included four performances listed in numerical order as each performance is preceded by its matrix number. numerical order, followed by the title.

The Association of Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) has over the years devised various cataloguing schemes for sound collections, and each one includes a place to list the matrix number. One of the group's most notable projects was explained in a 1997 article, "Formulating Guidelines for Discographies to be Published in the *ARSC Journal*, and listed in the ideal contents was a place for the matrix number.⁵⁴ With regard to label discography, the article stated that the matrix numbers are required and "may be the basis of organization."⁵⁵ In subject discographies and performer discographies guidelines, matrix numbers are also required. With regard to performer discography, the journal says, "We propose here that the recorded material ordinarily be arranged to display the development of the performer's career. If the discographer has access to studio logs, a list of recording sessions works well. If the performer worked in the pre-LP era, *matrix numbers will provide a chronological system even without such access.*"⁵⁶ (my emphasis.)

The matrix numbers thus can serve a the basic of chronology as the journal further explains: "In any era, the availability of recording dates will enable the discographer to arrange the material chronologically, even if it is necessary to interpolate some recordings of uncertain date...issue dates or issue numbers are not a satisfactory substitute for chronology." What the journal is saying her is that recordings listed by matrix number and interpolated is better than record issue numbers for development of chronology of a recording career.⁵⁷

Most casual music researchers will not even know what matrix numbers are, and make no use of them in obtaining access to recordings. Most archivists, therefore, whose repositories are limited in resources and man-hours may have to place limits on how much information to catalogue and might find matrix numbers expendable. And indeed theoretically they are. A researcher can request the record and examine it himself for the matrix number. Many archivists would argue, however, that including the matrix number in the cataloguing would eliminate this unnecessary handling of the disc, citing preservation concerns.⁵⁸

Matrix numbers appearing on phonograph recordings can help supply the chronology where company logs (and by extension published discographies) are missing or and even correct misinformation in company logs. For example, a 1997 issue of *ARSC Journal* gave a report on a research project on the discography of Brunswick Records, that will list all types of recordings made by Brunswick in the U.S. from 1919 to the end of 1931. The label was a premier label of the day that recorded hillbilly, jazz, blues, ethnic, classical, and Tin Pan Alley. The author reports, "for the earliest period from 1919 through to 10 February 1923 no file data seems to exist. I have used the matrix data shown in the wax of early Brunswick Records to reconstruct a large part of the recording activity at this time."⁵⁹

The ARSC/AAA Research Project

As some of the profiles of institutions examined in this paper have made evident sound archives have had a long history of not being able to keep up with the processing, cataloging, and preserving of their collections. There also has been much dispute among sound archivists on how these issues should be handled. The work of the ARSC/AAA Research Project is particularly

important in understanding the importance that sound archivists in this committee place on textual documentation and the matrix number.

Cognizant with the continuing difficulties in the whole field of sound archives, in 1974 a research group, the Association Audio Archives (AAA) Committee, was formed by representatives of a handful of sound archives, notably that of the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and the universities Syracuse and Yale. A particular concern was the slow pace of cataloguing and lack of reciprocity among institutions. AAA was at first an informal working group then in 1976 became an ad-hoc subcommittee of the ARSC Bibliographic Access Committee when ARSC sponsorship was obtained for the first AAA grant proposal. In 1982 AAA became a special committee of ARSC. By 1989 the committee membership had increased its membership to 15 institutions.⁶⁰

The ARSC/AAA Committee by 1989 had carried out four major research projects and produced three related publications--*Rules for Archival Cataloging of Sound Recordings*, *The Rigler and Deutsch Record Index*, and *Audio Preservation: A Planning Study*.⁶¹

The four projects were as follows:

1. "A Union Catalog of Commercially Issued Pre-LP Classical Music and Spoken Word Sound Recordings: A Planning Study."

One of the major tasks of the AAA Committee was to enhance access to member collections. Notes Elwood McKee, "Given the relatively recent recognition of the value of sound recordings in scholarly research, it is not surprising that catalog access to institutional collections has always lagged behind the acquisition of the recordings themselves."⁶² The Committee in 1974 learned, for example, that only 25 to 30 percent of the Yale sound collection was catalogued.

The committee agreed to start with pre-LP classical and spoken word, and not to include vernacular forms (folk, jazz, ethnic, blues, country, etc.). The vernacular music was "temporarily omitted" because of problems with library bibliographic rules for access points.⁶³ The committee published a rules for cataloguing that was still subject to revision, and suggested a microfilming project for cataloging purposes after technical tests determined that it was feasible.⁶⁴

2. "Data Collection for Archival Cataloging of Sound Recordings: A Pilot Project."

This particular project engendered the most controversy, and met the most resistance from member institutions. The AAA adopted the policy that microfilming should be the recommended means of data collection and documentation of collections of sound recordings. The principal criticisms directed at it was the microfilming was an "unnecessary extra step," the cost was prohibitive, not every sound recording can be successfully microfilmed, and the difficulty of adding and deleting such documentation when the archives accessions or deaccessions recordings.⁶⁵

As the AAA committee did call for a computerized index of the access points based on the microfilmed data, the "extra step" criticism is particularly justified. The salient point about this particular project for this paper is the high value the committee placed on textual documentation of the phonograph records. The computerized index of selected access points for each microfilm frame, namely label name, issue number, matrix number, composer/author, title, performers, holding institution siglum, and filming sequence number. The committee also believed that microfilming helps in preservation as it eliminates the need for handling by patrons.⁶⁶

3. "A Survey of Pre-LP Sound Recordings, The Rigler and Deutsch Record Index."

This was an pre-LP index of all commercial recordings collected in member institutions.

The limitation on classical and spoken word was eliminated. The index, created during 1981-83, is named after two contributors of the matching funds. The collections were microfilmed and from the microfilmed the data from the LPs was indexed. Significant problems with the project was that the quality of the hard copy indexed information suffered from "the lack of expertise on the part of the discographically untrained data entry personnel."⁶⁷ The second problem stemmed from the difficulty of use of computer-output-microfilm (COM) that challenged even trained librarians.⁶⁸

4. "Audio Preservation: A Planning Project."

The tremendously successful introduction of the CD into the marketplace impacted sound archives considerably, and generated discussions among AAA members concerning storage and handling, rerecording technology, acquisitions policies, and the preservation of existing holdings. The committee worked on some of these issues and prepared a written report, that received favorable acceptance.⁶⁹

All four of these projects were achieved only because they were supported by grants. The continual dependence on grants, however, has inhibited the ARSC/AAA Committee's work. For example, to extend the Rigler and Deutsch Index to the cataloging of LP and 45s the members could not raise the three million dollars matching funds limit set by the National Endowment of Humanities.⁷⁰

Use of Sound Archives in Scholarly Work

The recent scholarly work done with sound archives is represented here by both academic endeavors and trade book publishing of a high caliber. For a long time most scholarly research in music was in classical, jazz, folk, and ethnomusicology. In recent decades those areas for academic inquiry have been joined by such popular music genres as blues, rhythm and blues, country and western, and rock 'n' roll.

In 1972, when *Library Trends* devoted an entire issue to sound archival issues, the publication ran an article by Edward E. Colby on the uses that scholars made of sound archives, called "Sound Scholarship: Scope, Purpose, Function, and Potential of Phonorecord Archives," using what has become a common pun in this field. The field of vernacular music research had barely developed beyond jazz and folk studies, as evidenced by Colby's statement that "except in the field of jazz and ethnomusicology, the use of recordings in research and as a basis for research has been minimal."⁷¹

By 1979, however, when Cathleen C. Flanagan provided a compilation of various research projects that was being done with sound archives and published the results in the *ARSC Journal*, under the most descriptive title, "The Use of Commercial Sound Recordings in Scholarly Research," the uses had broadened considerably. She discusses use of sound recordings in theatrical research, literature (mainly poetry), and music studies. The bulk of her essay deals with music studies, which she grouped in the following categories: folksong and traditional music, country music, blues and jazz, popular music, and classical music.⁷²

Two typical examples of research projects she discusses are the work of Anne Cohen and Norman Cohen on early hillbilly music and the work of Bernard Shockett on blues. The Cohens listened to 280 hillbilly recordings made by 18 recording artists between 1922 and 1924 to determine the origins of the hillbilly repertoire. They found nearly 60 percent of the songs were derived from nineteenth century American folk and minstrel tradition, which significantly shapes our understanding the music origins. Their findings were published in an academic journal.⁷³

Shockett did a similar kind of survey with jazz records, analyzing a random sample of 331 recording from the period of 1971 to 1931 to trace "stylistic trends in the evolution of the

blues as practiced by jazz instrumentalists." From this pioneering analysis he was able to develop a list of eight features characterizing the type of composition which, because sometime after 1931 a "prototype" of what jazz musicians considered to be a blues. His work was done in a dissertation and never published.⁷⁴

Every single one of the more of the 60 research projects that Flanagan discussed dealt with studies of recorded sounds. At least that was her focus.⁷⁵ If it had occurred to her, Flanagan might have noticed that a the great deal of information her scholars undoubtedly gathered from the archives derived from textual documentation of the recordings as well as their sound documentation. As such, she reported on no research on discography or textual elements of phonographs. Yet the journal she was published in, *ARSC Journal*, gives considerable number of pages to each issue to discographical discussions and reports.

When this researcher looked at a far smaller sampling of scholarly research efforts done in the past few years involving the use of sound collections the reports reflect a wide variety of paper-base and sound recording research. For several of these projects the textual documentation provided by the sound recordings were critical. The following accounts were pulled from email correspondence by the researchers with the author and illustrate how sound archives can serve the scholarly researcher in some of the popular music genres.

Alan Balfour is an English researcher based in London. His vocation is a technical writer in the computer industry, but he has built a reputation in the last twenty years as one of the leading blues discographers. A principal project he was involved in was helping in the compilation of Mike Leadbitter and Neil Slaven's massive discography on post-World War II blues recordings.⁷⁶ Balfour, who used primarily the National Sound Archives (NSA) in the British Library in London, explains what he had to do: "I was presented with 1,000 sheets of paper and asked to check it (smile). I used the NSA holdings to correct song titles and check matrix numbers. This was especially useful with regard to postwar Victors, of which the NSA possessed a remarkable collection."⁷⁷

Balfour then provides a textbook example on how a researcher needs to examine the actual recordings both for their textual data and their sound evidence to correct the company's written session records that appears in published discographies. He explains, "One cannot perform such a task as that without examining what's on the label, and, by natural curiosity, look to see what's written in the wax of a 78 or 45. I am one of those who passionately believes that to compile discography correctly one just has to listen to 'everything' possible otherwise past assumptions (usually made from company ledgers) are perpetuated ad infinitum. The number of times I listened to something at the NSA an mouthed 'there's no pianist (or whatever) on that' despite the information having been gleaned from record company files."⁷⁸

David Bianco, who is a reference book editor in Detroit, has written a massive annotated discographical work on Motown Records, which was famed for its soul music recordings of the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁹ His principal archival source was the "Motown Collection" at the main library at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in Ypsilanti. The collection largely consisted of 45s and LP issued by Motown Records.

In his archives research, or more correctly special collections research, Bianco had to deal with primitive conditions and rudimentary collection organization. "Regarding the collection at EMU when I first began my research everything was in a closet (literally, a walk-in closet) somewhere in the library that was not open to the general public. The records were physically arranged by label and then by number, so there was some organization even though they were not catalogued. Eventually the collection was moved to a sound archives section in the

library, and people could access the records and actually listen to them."⁸⁰

Bianco, however, did not actually have to listen to the records to find them valuable for his research, as he explains, "Being able to view Motown singles helped to verify titles, who was credited as the artists on the release, and songwriting credits. I would caution though, that info on record labels is as subject to error as anything else. I was able to view some singles that were subsequently replaced [by a different title], because the collection at EMU was receiving its singles directly from the pressing plant."⁸¹

Bianco continues: "Seeing the 45s was also helpful in sorting out producers, as they changed frequently at Motown. In general, it was often the only way to find out who wrote and produced a particular song on an artist." Bianco goes on and explains how LP covers provided lists to all the songs on the album, "something which is usually left out of reviews and other secondary sources," he emphasizes. The liner notes of the LPs he points out were also helpful in providing personnel in the vocal groups, and the covers themselves gave information on variant artwork and design.⁸²

Bianco also used the Azelia E. Hackley Collection at the Detroit Public Library, from which he obtained much biographical information from paper-based sources. The collection also contained sound recordings and sheet music, but says Bianco, "none of it was organized or catalogued in any way, and the library made no effort to let people know about it. I was shown the 45s and the sheet music once the collection curator found out I was working on a book about Motown. I believe the library has since taken bids or made some effort to have the 45s and sheet music catalogued."⁸³

Michael Streissguth is a teacher at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York, and on the side he writes biographies on country and western recording stars.⁸⁴ For his biographies of Jim Reeves and Eddy Arnold for trade book publishers, Streissguth used three corporate archives, BMG Record Archives (New York City), Polygram Archives (New Jersey) and Library of American Broadcasting (New York City); two nonprofit archives, Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum (Studio City, Calif.) and the Country Music Foundation archives (Nashville, Tenn.); and a government archives, the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.). The materials he used in these archives was primarily textual; he used very few recordings.

Streissguth primarily used recording sheets of recording sessions from the corporate archives to build sessionographies and discographies. (Incidentally, the BMG and the Polygram is the successor names of RCA and Mercury respectively.) But the recording sheets provided more, as Streissguth explains, "Information from the recording sheets (session musicians and recording dates, for example) was also valuable in building the narratives in the books. For example, in describing the Jim Reeves plane crash, [which killed the singer], I alternated between the possible scene in the plane and the scene at the RCA studio in Nashville where many personnel were becoming increasingly alarmed at Reeves' disappearance. Chet Atkins was recording at the time and the recording sheets from that session allowed me to embroider the narrative with details such as song titles, session musicians present, and the time of the day in which the session was taking place."⁸⁵

A rare instance where he needed to check a recording for the purpose of listening to it was at the Gene Autry museum, as he relates, "The museum helped me identify songs that Autry recorded, wrote, and published. For example, Eddy Arnold sang a song entitled, 'If You'll Let Me Be Your Sweetheart' on his first radio broadcast. He said it was a Gene Autry song, but I thought he was confusing it with the old Tin Pan Alley standard, 'Let Me Be Your Sweetheart.' A check with the Autry museum confirmed that Eddy was right on. Autry had written and recorded the

song in the 1930s."⁸⁶

Even though Streissguth did not actually use phonograph records to gather session data to help him build his biography, the principal of use was the same--that is, discography serves as an essential building block in biographical research on popular music recording artists.

Dan Cooper is a freelance writer living in New York. At one time he was an associate editor at the Country Music Foundation publications division in Nashville. While in that capacity he wrote a 1995 trade book biography on country music great Lefty Frizzell, which won a prestigious Ralph J. Gleason award.⁸⁷

Cooper has been involved in many research projects not just the Frizzell biography. He relates, "I have for years made extensive use of the Country Music Foundation's media center and resource library--before, during, and after my tenure working there. I've relied on the CMF library and sound archives to research many projects. I used commercial phonograph records, radio broadcasts, and oral interviews, and in most of those cases, including my Lefty Frizzell research, I made use of both the recordings themselves and the textual documentation on them."⁸⁸

Nadine Cohodas, based in Washington, D.C., was the former senior writer for the Congressional Quarterly before she left a few years ago to devote her retirement to writing books. Her first book, a biography of Strom Thurmond, was largely built on research on paper-based collections in various archives, notably the Strom Thurmond Archives at Clemson University, the Caroliniana Room at the University of South Carolina, and other archives at the University of Georgia and the Library of Congress.⁸⁹ There was one memorable situation where she needed to use some sound materials, as she explains, "I used the Recorded Sound Room at the Library of Congress for the Thurmond book to listen to old Fred Allen shows because I wanted to know about his 'Senator Claghorn.'"⁹⁰ The well known Allen character was a spoof of baffoonish Southern politicians, which was how Thurmond was viewed by Northerners early in his career.

Cohodas is currently working on a biography of Leonard and Phil Chess, founders of Chess Records in Chicago, and her research involves both paper-based and sound materials. She is making extensive use of the Library of Congress for their back issues of two record industry trade magazines, *Billboard* and *Cash Box*. And she has used their sound recordings when she needed to listen to some early artists for the Chess brothers, which have not been made available on CD.⁹¹

Commercial Use of Sound Archives

London-based Dave Penny works for the MCPS (Mechanical Copyright Protection Society), which is the United Kingdom's membership organization that represents thousands of songwriters, composers, and music publishers. MCPS negotiates agreements with those who wish to record music and ensures that the copyright owners are paid for the use of their music. The society collects and then distributes mechanical royalties, which are royalties earned from the sale of CDs, tape cassettes, videos, and broadcast programs.

Penny specifically works as the Specialist Repertoire Researcher for the MCPS department known as the National Discography, which maintains a database of hundreds of thousands of recordings. His most recent project is due to a recent European Economic Community (EEC) ruling that calls for all musicians (even session musicians) who played on recording to receive a proportion of the royalty payment from broadcast revenue. He notes, "The National Discography database is an important resource now that the information is required by the record companies following the recent EEC directive."⁹²

Penny continuously searches published and online discographies from all over the world to update the National Discography. He makes heavy use of the National Sound Archives. He explains, "The MCPS has a 'special relationship' with the NSA, although we are completely different organizations. MCPS has an office at the NSA's London EC1 Building and I usually spend about one week a month there researching the NSA acquisitions. The relationship is very useful to both parties as the British Library can use the MCPS database (which is far superior to their own), while MCPS has access to virtually every recording released in the UK for research purposes."⁹³

Rex Doane is an NPR radio show producer who resides in New York City. He has done many freelance articles on rhythm and blues artists, but his most recent project is producing a CD collection on African American deejays of the 1950s and 1960s. The collection, called *Soul on the Dial*, is scheduled to be released by Tommy Boy records in early 1999.

To find examples of deejay broadcast samples, Doane searched both the well-established aircheck collectors circuit and certain archives, notably the Center for African American Studies at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. The Center's media center houses a sizable black radio archives. He paid a small fee for an itemized printout, articles, photos, and airchecks that make up their holdings.⁹⁴

Because Doane represented a profit-making enterprise there were some costs involved, as he explains: "Use of their materials for a commercial endeavor such as the CD include a sliding scale fee that makes a distinction between commercial and academic application of the archives. For example, there's a modest \$7 fee for photo duplication and use of a photo a scholarly journal, and a \$150 fee for use in something like a CD booklet. Portia Maltsby, the archivist at the Center, mentioned that a couple of the major donors outlined a fee structure and availability of the material."⁹⁵

At the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Doane met another kind of donor restriction, where if he wanted to use a deejay's voice on a CD he had to contact the donor and clear it with him or her. As true of most of the researchers here, he was looking not only for sound but also paper-base documentation.⁹⁶

Mike Callahan works for the federal government in Washington, D.C. and has nearby access to the Library of Congress Sound Room. There he did mostly paper-base research for a record company liner notes project, called *Rock Artifacts*, a series of CDs for Sony Records, 1990-91. "I looked up the copyrights to all the songs on the four volumes to get the complete names correct," he relates, "and used some of the books in the Sound Room to look up discographical information. More importantly, I used the copyright office's files to look up the last known addresses/phones of several songwriters to get interviews. It's a wonderful way to track down old rock 'n' rollers! All you have to do is come to Washington, D.C., and look in the files."⁹⁷

These researchers have nothing but good things to say about the role of archivists and archives in their research. Says Cohodas, "I can't say enough of about how helpful good and interested librarians and archivists can be. I give them great thanks, as they can lead you to things that you might not have thought to ask for."⁹⁸ Toronto-based Colin Escott, who has written a host of books, most notably books on Sun Records and country star Hank Williams, when musing about the value of a particular archive, that of the Country Music Foundation, fondly stated, "I'd have to say that the CMF Library is my university."⁹⁹

Related Alan Balfour, "The older I become I am more and more convinced that based upon my 'work' and 'hobby' experiences, getting librarians and record collectors working under

the same roof is probably the answer to sustaining scholarly study of popular music."¹⁰⁰

Appendix

Case Study of Research Based On Sound Recordings:

The Red Saunders Research Foundation

It is not all that evident from the preceding that all sound archivists have a full appreciation of the uses that music historians and other scholars can make of the recorded sound collections. There is lack of appreciation in particular that certain vernacular collections may be of value to scholars and there is a similar lack of appreciation--as we have seen from some archivists--for the textual documentation that appears on the phonograph records. The following case study, which examines the work of a dedicated online Website on post-World War II jazz discography called the "Red Saunders Research Foundation," will examine the type of research that is being done on it rather than the subject content of the site. The site is named after one of the premier jazz musicians in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Red Saunders Research Foundation (RSRF) Website was established by Robert Campbell, a psychology professor at Clemson University, South Carolina. He put his research project on the Internet in May 1997.¹⁰¹ His aim is to compile detailed annotated discographies of record labels and jazz artists that had a significant presence in Chicago in the postwar era. Campbell in his introduction to the site explains, "The Red Saunders Research Foundation is dedicated to increasing our knowledge of the musicians who filled the clubs and recording studios of Chicago with great music during the two decades after World War II."¹⁰²

Previously, Campbell had written extensively about the Chicago-based jazz musician, Sun Ra, and his creation of the Red Saunders site is a means to help understand the context, or musical world, the avant-garde jazz legend sprang from. While there is a considerable literature on jazz in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s, the literature is meager on the post-World War II scene.

The site acts as a collective online research project. Campbell will mount a page reflecting the extant discographical information on an artist or a record label and then will seek corrections and additions from other researchers, most of whom are on the Internet. Responses by contributors are sent by regular mail or by email, and by this method the discographies grow and get corrected as a wider and wider web of correspondents become involved. In May of 1997, when the RSRF site was launched, only pages on Tom Archia and Red Saunders were set up.¹⁰³ Since that time it has grown to include listings for 13 recording artists and five labels.¹⁰⁴

As of October 1998, the site has extensive annotated discographies on the following artists: Tom Archia, Buster "Leap Frog" Bennett, Four Blazes, Jimmy Coe, Tommy Dean, Dozier Boys, Eddie Johnson, Willie Jones, King Kolax, Sax Mallard, Claude McLin, Red Saunders, and Al Smith.

The site include histories and discographies on the following labels: Aristocrat, Chance, Miracle, Parrot, and Ping labels.

On October 4, 1998, Campbell announced that the RSRF site was essentially complete from his standpoint, but that he would put up new pages for artist and label discographies that outside contributors wish to add.¹⁰⁵

Most of the contributors have used published and recorded materials from their own collections in their research efforts for the site. Armin Buettner, from Basel, Switzerland, has consulted the Swizz Jazz Museum, but largely for paper-based manuscript discographies. James

Wolf, based in Washington, D.C., did some research in the Library of Congress Sound Room.¹⁰⁶

The organizing principal of the artist discographies on the site is the recording session listed chronologically, each which lists in numerical order the various performances by matrix number. The organizing principal of the label discography is the matrix number in numerical order (meaning normally chronological order).

The work the RSRF has done on the Aristocrat label is particularly important and illustrates the uses that music researchers and discographers make of the textual information found on recordings. The Aristocrat label is the predecessor to the famed Chess Record label in Chicago and understanding its recording history will provide a window on the activities of Chess at the dawn of its creation. Typically, however, as an independent label, where company files are often missing, there are no extant company files for Aristocrat's first two years. Reports record producer Bob Porter, "I've been around tape vaults at Prestige, Savoy, Verve, and Atlantic as well as Chess, and Chess was far and away the worst organized in terms of data. Just a mess."¹⁰⁷

Missing and poorly organized company files will also impact the quality of the data that shows up on the published discographies as well. The most notable discography that covers Aristocrat is that of a Swiss researcher, Michel Ruppli, who compiled *The Chess Discography*, but of course because of the lack of files for the early years it is woefully incomplete and incorrect on its Aristocrat listings. Therefore, in building a discography of Aristocrat the RSRF has to use the record labels themselves. Says Campbell, "We have used the Ruppli discography when nothing else is at hand (hard to avoid when the material has never been issued), but *whenever it could be done, collectors have inspected the physical artifacts in their collections to verify the connection (and many corrections have been necessary as a result).*"¹⁰⁸ (my emphasis.)

The Aristocrat discography produced by the RSRF is so heavily annotated that it serves as a history of the label in addition as a discographical resource. The most valuable contribution to that history is its clarification of the early years of the company before the Chess brothers found their successful niche in the recording market recording blues. Aristocrat originated as a company that covered practically the entire gamut of vernacular styles--jazz, country, pop, and even polka.

The Aristocrat page also illustrates how the matrix number serves as the overwhelming basis of research. That is because Aristocrat had a unique system of issue numbers. The release history of most labels can be determined by looking at the listing of releases which can easily be determined chronologically because the each phonograph record has an issue number that places it in numerical sequence. As we had seen that is the central organizing principal of most sound archives.

What Aristocrat did differently and what made it difficult for researchers to determine its history is that the company assigned each artist its own series of issue numbers. This made hash of any attempt to organize the label by consecutive release numbers. However, because the RSRF made matrix number order its central organizing principal by creating a matrix (or table) of Aristocrat recordings, a history of the company's recording strategies was gradually unfolded. With a table of matrix numbers one could then fill in missing dates or approximate dates of the recording sessions and release schedules. The level of the company's production at different times could be determined and what artists they chose to record when. What was then provided was a detailed portrait of a company that gradually moved from recording all genres to one that became primarily a blues label.

The Red Saunders Research Foundation has already made contributions to music history both scholarly and commercially. Dave Penny who needs to track down recording artists'

discographical credits for UK's Mechanical Copyright Protection Society says, "I've spend hours studying the RSRF site (which I would have done for pleasure anyway...but I am getting paid for it). It has helped us and I have emailed a couple additions to Robert."¹⁰⁹ In the summer of 1998, John Collis' *The Story of Chess Records* was published. His early history of the label was largely derived from the work Campbell and his fellow researchers did on the Aristocrat label.¹¹⁰ Nadine Cohodas, who contributed historical information to the Aristocrat page, is using the findings of Campbell and company on Aristocrat and Tom Archia (an Aristocrat recording artist) in her forthcoming book on the Chess brothers.¹¹¹

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³ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Deborah Gillaspie, curator of the Chicago Jazz Archives. Interview by author. 30 November 1998. Chicago. Phone interview notes. Brenda Nelson-Strauss, archivist of the CSO Archives. Interview by author. 3 November 1998. Chicago. Tape recording transcript. Both representatives reported that their archives collect CDs.

⁶ The literature on sound archive preservation is extensive. Some of the most notable articles are as follows in chronological order: Walter L. Welch, "Preservation and Restoration of Authenticity in Sound Recordings," *Library Trends* Vol. 21, No. 1 (July 1972): 83-100. Marie P. Griffin, "Preservation of Rare and Unique Materials at the Institute of Jazz Studies," *ARSC Journal* Vol. 17, No. 1 (1985): 11-17. Elwood McKee, "AAA Audio Preservation Planning Project," *ARSC Journal* Vol. 18, No. 1-3 (1986): 20-32. Mary B. Bowling, "Literature on the Preservation of Nonpaper Materials," *American Archivist* Vol. 53 (Spring 1990): 340-348. Barbara Sawka, "Audio Preservation in the United States: A Report on the ARSC/AAA Planning Study," *Midwestern Archivist* Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1991): 5-10. Christopher Ann Paton, "Preservation of Acetate Disc Sound Recordings at Georgia State University," *Midwestern Archivist* Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1991): 11-20. Brenda Nelson-Strauss, "Preserving Chicago Symphony Orchestra Broadcast Tapes," *Midwestern Archivist* Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1991): 21-30.

⁷ Christopher Ann Paton, "Whispers in the Stacks: The Problem of Sound Recordings in Archives," *American Archivist* Vol. 53 (Spring 1990): 275.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹¹ Christopher Ann Paton, "Annotated Selected Bibliography of Works Relating to Sound Recordings and Magnetic and Optical Media." *The Midwestern Archivist* Vol. XVI, No. (1991): 31-47.

¹² "Appraisal," 118-119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴ Christopher Ann Paton, email letter to author, 12 October 1998.

¹⁵ Helen F. Harrison, *The Archival Appraisal of Sound Recordings and Related Materials: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*. Paris: General Information Programme and UNISIST, 1987, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷ Paton, email.

¹⁸ Harrison, 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ "Appraisal," 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²² Larry Holdridge, Mildred Petrie, Ted Sheldon, Gary Thalheimer, "Disposal of Record Collections: Four Views." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 55.

²³ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁴ David H. Thomas, "Cataloging Sound Recordings Using Archival Methods." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* Vol. 11, Nos. 3/4 (1990): 194.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195-201.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 211.
- ³² Ellen Garrison, "Neither Fish Nor Fowl Nor Good Red Meat: Using Archival Description Techniques for Special Format Materials." *Archival Issues* Vol. 21, No. 1 (1996): 63. In 1993, at the Midwest Archives Conference/ARSC conference in Chicago, I had the pleasure of having lunch with Ms. Garrison. Her enthusiastic proactive approach to collection building was evident when she asked me--prompting me to consider my mortality--if I had given any thought to the eventual disposition of my extensive research files and large record collection.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 64.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ³⁷ Brenda Nelson-Strauss interview.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Gillaspie, Deborah L. "Chicago Jazz Archives." Online site <http://lib.uchicago.edu/LibInfo/Libraries/CJA>, 27 November 1998.
- ⁴¹ Gillaspie interview.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ Elwood McKee, "Developing and Selecting Cataloging Systems for Private Collections." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1996): 54.
- ⁴⁵ "Disposal," 57.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Tim Brooks, "An Open Letter to Discographers." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 65.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Gordon Stevenson, "Discography: Scientific, Analytical, Historical and Systematic," *Library Trends* Vol. 21, No. 1 (July 1972): 109.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Peter Grendysa, "Record Dating: The State of the Art," *Goldmine* 15 August 1986, p. 69. The article discusses the two codes and Grendysa provides charts of both. The delta code was discovered by record collector Warren Cook in 1965.
- ⁵² "Appraisal," 129.
- ⁵³ Paton, email.
- ⁵⁴ Jerome F. Weber, "Formulating Guidelines for Discographies to be Published in the *ARSC Journal*." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 1997): 200.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 204
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵⁸ Elwood McKee, "ARSC/AAA: Fifteen Years of Cooperative Research." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1989): 6

⁵⁹ Ross Laird, "Brunswick Records Discography." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 1997): 190.

⁶⁰ "ARSC/AAA," 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.* 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷¹ Colby, Edward F. "Sound Scholarship: Scope, Purpose, Function and Potential of Phonorecord Archives." *Library Trends* Vol. 21, No. 1 (July 1972): 20.

⁷² Cathleen C. Flanagan, "The Use of Commercial Sound Recordings in Scholarly Research." *ARSC Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1979): 5-6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-17.

⁷⁶ Mike Leadbitter and Neil Slaven, *Blues Records, 1943-1970: A Selective Discography, Volume One A-K*, London: Record Information Services, 1987. Mike Leadbitter, Les Fancourt, and Paul Pelletier, *Blues Records, 1943-1970: A Selective Discography, Volume Two L-Z*. London: Record Information Services, 1994.

⁷⁷ Alan Balfour, email letter to author, 1 December 1998.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ David Bianco, *Heat Wave: The Motown Fact Book*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian Press, 1988.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Mike Streissguth, *Eddy Arnold: Pioneer of the Nashville Sound*, New York: Schirmer, 1997; *Moth to a Flame: The Jim Reeves Story*, Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998.

⁸⁵ Mike Streissguth, email letter to author, 1 December 1998.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Daniel Cooper, *Lefty Frizzell: The Honky-tonk Life of Country Music's Greatest Singer*, Boston: Little Brown, 1995.

⁸⁸ Dan Cooper, email letters to author, 3 and 4 December 1998.

- ⁸⁹ Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond & the Politics of Southern Change*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- ⁹⁰ Nadine Cohodas, email letter to author, 27 November 1998.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹² Dave Penny, email letters to author, 25 and 26 November 1998.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁴ Rex Doane, email letter to author, 3 December 1998.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷ Mike Callahan, email letter to author, 27 November 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Cohodas email.
- ⁹⁹ Colin Escott, with George Merritt William MacEwen, *Hank Williams: The Biography*. Boston: Little Brown, 1994; Colin Escott, email letter to author, 27 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁰ Balfour email.
- ¹⁰¹ Robert Campbell, email letters to the author, 4 and 15 October, 29 November 1998.
- ¹⁰² Robert Campbell, "The Red Saunders Research Foundation." Online site <http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~campber/rsrf.html>, 23 November 1998.
- ¹⁰³ Campbell email.
- ¹⁰⁴ Robert Campbell, "The Aristocrat Label," Online site <http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~campber/aristocrat.html>, 16 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁵ Campbell email.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁷ "The Aristocrat Label."
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁹ Penny email.
- ¹¹⁰ John Collis, *The Story of Chess Records*, New York: Bloomsbury, 1998, pp. 26-29.
- ¹¹¹ Cohodas email.