The most public of all history: family history and heritage albums in the transmission of records
Tucker, S.N.

Citation for published version (APA):
Tucker, S. N. (2009). The most public of all history: family history and heritage albums in the transmission of records
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Anna cannot remember a time in her eighty years when she did not collect family
history. She tells of this practice in a voice that holds French intonation, occasional
Southern expressions, and what most Americans usually associate (incorrectly) with
Brooklyn, New York nasal sounds. Like this New Orleans accent, her belongings and her
activities are embodied legacies in various forms. For example, in what she calls her
“memory room,” she discusses choosing the pattern of her chintz curtains to imitate the
curtains of a seamstress aunt. In other explanations too, ancestors always figure: their
recipes are her recipes; their holidays are not so different than her own; this grandchild
today is named for this deceased uncle; and her errands involve routes chosen so as to see
neighborhoods where relatives once lived. Almost every day she spends time sorting,
labeling, transcribing, and writing about letters, certificates, paintings, artifacts, and other
memorabilia. At night, she cuts and pastes some of these items into heritage albums,
scrapbooks designed to hold family history. Here are photocopied pages of handwritten
registers and bible entries showing births and deaths, small textile pieces and photos of
embroidered samplers, receipts of family businesses, marriage licenses, and photographs

1 Anna’s name here is a pseudonym. All other family historians and album makers in this project, unless
given last names, are also identified by pseudonyms.
of first communions. Here are parts of book jackets, movie ticket stubs, and other ephemera, which stand as reminders of her participation in particular moments in local and national culture. Besides her memory work at home, once a month she makes scrapbooks in groups with other women.

Her forty-nine-year-old cousin Joseph also practices family history, but in so many ways his boundaries of genealogical culture are at once wider and more remote than those of Anna. For learning about the past, he uses libraries and archives to find records that were created originally for the business of governments, churches, schools, and other organizations. For years, he spent every lunch hour and every Saturday with these sources. He also worked in consultation with other men and women in genealogical interest groups where together they developed expertise about records. Joseph came to know much about birth certificates, marriage licenses, and death certificates; probate and land records; pages from city directories; maps of Louisiana, and German and French towns. In the use of these publicly held and usually publicly created sources, his work differs from that of Anna and her privately held, often privately created sources. However, some of what he calls “my documents” or “my originals” can be found in photocopies placed in her memory room and heritage albums. Except for these records shared with Anna or other records scanned and saved to a laptop computer, all his materials were lost in the New Orleans flood following hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Goals and Definitions

This study explores the practices of Anna, Joseph, and others like them. The two main questions posed are simple ones: “What circumstances lead to an interest in family records?” and “What does work with these records involve?” From the answers to these
questions one learns characteristics of memory practitioners and the types of sources they use; the relationships of the material and electronic tools of recordkeeping to knowledge about families passed between generations; the assignment of particular social roles to particular people as memory keepers; and the influences of migration on motivations to keep family history.

For all these common activities the terms “family history” and “genealogy” are used interchangeably. The former term, however, is a newer one (sometimes called “the new genealogy”) and is used primarily to define a more embracive practice encompassing attention to the context of lives as much as the names on family trees and pedigree charts. As in the comparison between Anna and Joseph, album makers labor with family history but not in quite the same way that family historians do: album makers utilize oral accounts and primarily private records, while family historians use both private and public records. In order that comparisons can be made between these and other varying sources, methods, and characteristics, the terms and categories “album makers” and “family historians” are deliberately observed and utilized.

The older meanings of genealogy itself are central to both groups. From the Greek genea meaning “family” and logos meaning “discourse” or “knowledge,” genealogy is “a universal phenomenon and, in forms varying from the rudimentary to the comparatively complex,” is a centuries-old practice. The simple desire to possess

---

information about those from whom one descends has fueled generations of people who compile lists of ancestors. Genealogy, then, is one of the most enduring yet simultaneously changing forms of recordkeeping throughout time. Yet the structures and places of learning to know ancestors alter under the influence of social and educational practices, religion, new materials, and new technologies.

The types of people involved in this evolution have also changed over time. Today, Anna is considered an outsider to the mainstream of family history since most of her work is completed at home and in the homes of others. This insider vs. outsider status reflects on earlier societies where genealogical records proved land rights and one’s place in a hierarchical society. Such records were, in almost every case, greater in size in the grand houses of the nobility than in the homes of the peasants and the middle class.6 Ownership of records and an interest in access to records shifted slowly to more people as literacy spread, as improved print technologies made for more records, and as legal and legislative changes made the government accountable to citizens. Today, genealogical records hold other types of power, or what could be called, “cultural capital,”7 i.e., the benefits of connections provided average people to the inscribed past, connections to their own identities as chosen from the past, and connections to one another in the present.8

---

Genealogical research is considered as being based upon “oral traditions and documentary sources” with the latter far outweighing the former. There is a sort of balance between the two, however, since family historians are told to begin with interviews of family members, their oral accounts, and private records. In this respect, one could consider both oral and written sources as “memory texts,” a term conveying the fact that material objects, records, and spoken accounts function together with tools of reading, writing, and technology to produce documentary sources. Drawing from ideas of a number of scholars interested in social or collective memory, this study will show how the mediation of various actor-networks are marshaled not only to reflect the past but also to conform to the present and move towards the future, to shift between public and private spaces, and to mediate and structure different forms of memory and daily practices.

In all family history work, there is a continuum of transmission of records, and a mixture of, and movement between, private and public records. Understanding this dynamic is dependent on exploring a broad definition of records as always in the process of being re-interpreted, as moving actors in collectively-held and collectively-negotiated

---


10 See, for example, Arlene Eakle and Johni Cerny, eds., The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, Pub., 1984), and also subsequent editions in 1997 and 2006.


representations of the past.\textsuperscript{13} Family history thus can be seen as an evolving process in which various interactions remake collective memory.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Memories’ Practices, Memories’ People}

Album makers and family historians are representative of a “situated knowledge.”\textsuperscript{15} They produce various memory texts, they pass these on, and they follow certain rules and conventions in doing so. Their work involves present activities and, more, present-mindedness about the past alongside access to records of the past. Pierre Nora’s assertion that “modern memory is first of all archival” is certainly found among family historians and album makers. However, so too is something Nora held to be untrue, which is that memory is also experienced in equal fashion from what he calls “within.”\textsuperscript{16} Anna’s explanation of choices in fabric, names, recipes, and geography comes from within herself, from things learned in her family. Other album makers and family historians also achieve some middle ground between the “spontaneous” lived \textit{milieu} of memory and the \textit{lieux} of memory, between the places where memory is lived in language choices and other habits and institutions,\textsuperscript{17} and where memory is sought in “vestiges” that are sanctioned as proof and “symbolic of the memorial heritage.”\textsuperscript{18}

This in-between of a living and archival memory is found in the accounts of the family historians and album makers (told in Chapters Five, Six and Seven). From these

\textsuperscript{15} Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” \textit{Feminist Studies} 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 575–599.
\textsuperscript{18} Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” 6–7.
people, one learns how various constituents (governments recording vital statistics, organizations tracking members, people holding records, and seekers of these records) come together to allow family history. Where does this coordination come from? Since the late nineteenth century, groups interested in family history have become progressively more inclusive, allowing coordination to begin with people like Anna and Joseph, who would be defined in the world of popular culture as “hobbyists,” but who are actually in many cases, more serious than this name makes them sound. Here the important point is that they work as private individuals who yet define their work as shared. This collectivity is also shaped by other types of individuals and groups. Joining people like Anna and Joseph are beginners, professional genealogists, Mormons, archivists, librarians, digital album makers, and workers in various commercial firms—with many of these people occupying more than one category. Together they are all significant players who complement one another to make a lived and archival world of family history work, sharing and giving to one another and future generations. They do so because the customs of genealogy, more often than not, have been created around communal efforts. While there are hierarchies of skills and backgrounds, the practice of family history largely begins with an ethos of circulation and exchange.

Alongside a lived and archival memory, collectivity also concerns the idea that the legacy of the past should be created in accumulations. People like Anna and Joseph are the starting point for a belief that the individual contributes various little pieces to the

---

19 Following the vocabulary of family historians, the terms “the Latter Day Saints” and “Mormons” are preferred in this study, though the actual name of this religious denomination is the “Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.”

heap of facts that will be added to the “mountain of names.”

Their shared work makes for a “community of records.” This term “community of records” or, others like it (a “mnemonic community,” an “interpretive community,” a “community of memory”) can easily be applied to reflect upon the mutual efforts, the sharing, and ultimately, the formation of collective memory. A community of records is framed within the wide definitions of the records that it creates, a definition that embraces not only written documentation but also the many forms of remembrance and recording that include oral traditions, public ceremonies, commemorations, artifacts, and markers such as public statues and private grave sites.

The public and private realms nurture this frame and create a positioning in which the use of public and private records in tandem is expected.

How are their gatherings transmitted? Joseph shares with Anna a similar accent and some common ancestors, but his “memory room,” the place where he would store his materials is sparsely furnished with two chairs, one sofa, and one desk—all new in 2007. The walls are bare. Asked if he once had a memory room, he pauses and then says, “No, not in the way Anna does.”

He had photographs, of course, and many filing cabinets,
and he “loved” the “collecting” of records. “Knowing the city through genealogy took up every lunch hour for years,” he says. It is knowing the city he emphasizes as he continues:

Example, here was this great influx of people, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant. They lived in the Irish Channel, called it that. See this picture Anna had framed for me this Christmas. That’s the three red-headed Irish-French sisters on the steps—Catholic—with one of the Jewish boys of the neighborhood. She married him. I went looking for those kinds of people but I found that kind of city.

He could be understood as discussing modernity with its movement of peoples and focus on progress, or postmodernity with its liberal understanding of many truths. He could be discussing the multicultural city that then yielded a diversity of records forms and practices, that would shape how collective memory was at first possible. He could also be reflecting on the processes of various forms of transmission creating collective memory, of “mnemohistory.” Yet, only in the gesture of the hand, a pointing of the finger, is the sister who married the boy made known. In addition, the photograph is black and white but he has spoken of “the red-headed sisters.” He annotates the picture; it cannot become a story told without his narration. As Martha Langford suggests about the organization of photograph albums, such conversational details preserve “the structures of oral tradition for new uses in the present.”

Joseph recalls images from materials lost in the 2005 flooding:

---


I don’t think I will return to get them, go back to the libraries and the courthouses and the state archives, but I could…. It’s comforting to know they are there and that I could go back and redo all the work I had done. At least, now it seems comforting, before it just seemed so sad.

In this loss, he understands on a deep level one of the purposes of archives: that they safeguard the representations of past actions.

Anna’s albums do not have this same sort of accessibility or protection. They are not available “in the lunch hours at the public library” or via formalized rights to materials. They are not duplicated, though now with digital and photo duplication possible and in reaction to the danger of hurricanes, she does consider a need for copies. Yet, they are, these heritage albums and her work, part of a wider world than is first apparent, part of a long tradition of private recordkeeping that allows a preservation of various accounts that stand as part of, and opposite to, official versions of the past. While the very name of “heritage” suggests an inherent traditionalism, the albums can also be seen as providing alternate views, and of becoming small revolutionary acts. They preserve a culture that Todd Steven Gernes found among nineteenth-century women in their use of “ingenuity, dialogue, and folkways of handicraft constructionism,” which was more or less replaced by an academic discourse that looked down on creations in scrapbooks.30 As Dale Spender found in her examination of the structuring of the English language by the patriarchy, these women scrapbook makers have been placed outside what is normally transmitted as knowledge:

The dichotomy of male/female, public/private is maintained by permitting women to write for private audiences (which can be extended to encompass other women) but discouraging them from writing for a public audience, that is, men. In the

private sphere, women have been permitted to write for themselves (for example, diaries) and for each other.\textsuperscript{31}

Women album makers and most family historians remained in the twentieth century and even today “outsiders” to the established world of knowledge. They were amateurs denied entrance to the academy. As Beth Davis-Brown and Richard Harvey Brown note about what they call “free intellectuals”:

[B]etween them and the knowledge workers who claim the titles of curator, archivist, librarian, or director ... there runs a symbolic and material border, a line that divides the orthodox representatives of knowledge and memory from the non-orthodox and unauthorized speakers.\textsuperscript{32}

This dividing line was rooted in the privileging of “secular national memory” over “sacred tribal memory.” In this progression, “History” (with a capital H) came to be preferred over “family and clan histories.” “Modern archives, libraries and museums,” which Emile Durkheim saw as necessary, were made “to constitute the collective sense of moral solidarity”\textsuperscript{33} to hold this national memory. Album makers and family historians came to serve other functions. Album makers followed a path not unlike that which Bonnie Smith observed in women writers of historical fiction, biography, and travel accounts: they “articulated liminality that worked to mark out the boundaries, spaces, and locations of femininity.”\textsuperscript{34} In other words they came to focus on women’s history. One part of this history was women’s care of the family

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Robertson} Ibid., 19; Ian Robertson, “Emile Durkheim,” in \textit{Encyclopedia of Sociology} (Guilford, CT: Duskin Publishing Group, 1974), 92.
\end{thebibliography}
record. Male family historians, as well, came to embody “a genre of recollection,” underlying but very much outside the larger academic history.

Yet, in the preferences and origins of both the academy and the amateur’s realms, private memory remained, however obscured. It became a seamless part of the public memory and history, in many cases its base, but one positioned so as to be, at times, invisible. As Penelope Papailias notes,

Precisely those qualities that discredit the products of these independent labors in the eyes of professional historians—their blatant partiality, sentimental tone, verbosity, and outdated or inconsistent methodologies—testify to the availability of history as a discourse on the self as well as the tremendous investment that people have made in documenting and witnessing a past that they—or others—consider their “own.”

This obscurity of private record keepers is complicated by what is sometimes seen as a schism between records and manuscripts, collecting libraries and archives. In the division between the historic manuscript and public archives traditions come questions about the nature of public and private records themselves. Pertinent here is the

---

36 Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History*, 10. Manuals on family history begin with the private records, for example, one chapter among ten to twenty on public records. See, for example, various editions of *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*.
perspective that documents created “for a purpose in themselves” are not records.\(^{39}\) On the other hand, there exists another interpretation of private documentary forms as very much transactions of the self, records that are “evidence of me”\(^{40}\) or “the site of multiple constructs—of a person upholding and struggling with ideas, of self and of others, while simultaneously contradicting, convincing, and contriving.”\(^{41}\)

This project takes the latter belief, arguing that albums form parts of private and personal archives, and increasingly, public history. Deliberately albums are not seen as collections, though collecting habits and the ways some scholars have thought of them as collections are considered.\(^{42}\) Rather, the album makers are participants in technologies shaping home and public archives; in sharing what they create, and in using accessible records, they partake in shaping public history. They are participants in what Papailias names as part of the distinction between historical product and historical production.\(^{43}\)

Heritage albums, in the spectrum of family history work, can also be considered a prototype of a record in that they are often the first account, sometimes the only account, of various life events. As such, they are important to understanding subsequent negotiations shaping archives and collective memory.

The word “heritage” has its own complexity, reflecting on the heritage movement of the late twentieth century. Heritage is no longer restricted to what one inherits as an individual or a family but has expanded to include the legacies of national and local


\(^{40}\) McKemmish, “Evidence of Me,” 28–45.


\(^{43}\) Papailias, *Genres of Recollection*, 16.
landmarks, and other features marking the past. Heritage, like collective or social memory, concerns interactions among personal, community, and social memory. An interest in the past evoking the word “heritage” is played out as a form of public history (although not without controversy) in historical theme parks, commemorative exhibits in museums, and films. Heritage albums represent this movement in microcosm, a part of a populist history shaped by a consumer culture. But with new technology, the album makers also shape this culture, creating their private and public versions of the larger history of families and nations. Heritage albums were popularized in the 1990s by scrapbookers, who defined these particular scrapbooks as any handmade or unique-to-its-maker book (thus accommodating electronically produced albums) with genealogical information, as well as other materials documenting events, institutions, and organizations. In such books, “stories, people, traditions, and keepsakes of ancestry” could be joined.

Heritage albums have a genealogy of their own, discussed in Chapter Three, but briefly here placed within the progression from the tablets of antiquity, to commonplace books, to the album amicorum, to scrapbooks, to photo albums, and now, to many digitally-born forms. Anna does not know this progression but she knows that as a child she created scrapbooks in recycled ledgers, in Sears’ catalogs, or upon “whatever piece of

---


paper she could find and sew together.” Her childhood habits of recordkeeping, like her work today, rested on technological improvements, the availability of print and paper, her skills as a reader and what might be called a poacher or a gleaner of the materials.

Joseph’s observations also allow insight into an environment that made for wishing to find materials to help him know the past. He began because he did not know his father. Family history allowed him first to place himself in proximity to some aspect of his father’s life, and then, by surprise, took him to knowledge about the past in general. The maps of European towns and villages symbolized to him the genetic material he himself carried and that brought his father an early death—the migration, one might say, of a living (and in this case, dying) inheritance.

Like Joseph’s father’s absence, genealogy always has concerned loss: the threat of lost property if ancestry could not be documented, the memorialization of the dead so that family honor could be inscribed in stone, or in some other form to mark a life lived amidst the constancy of death. The progression of Joseph’s interest from the personal to the communal is not unusual; it illustrates the fluid movement between private and public realms, between heritage and history. Genealogy in general promotes an identification with the immeasurable backlog of the dead, and the immeasurable future of those yet to be born. As one family historian said, “After a while there are no names, but you know

they are there, and who are they but just people? Even the ones you have the names on, well that may be all you have, so you have to look for the bigger picture to even begin to understand them.”

Women and Men

Neither Joseph nor Anna is unusual among memory practitioners. Yet Joseph, being a man, represents neither the stereotype of a family historian (who is a woman) nor the majority of those people who are most actively involved in genealogy (who are women). The predominance of women among family historians follows a long history. Since medieval times, women have overtly and tacitly overseen family memories. They have coordinated the memorialization of the dead, told stories of the past to the young, connected generations by other tangible and symbolic gifts of the family, and welcomed newcomers by allowing insight into the family. Set parallel to this assignment were the

---


learned men who, from the priesthood of the middle ages to the late nineteenth-century antiquarians, controlled publicly inscribed genealogical efforts, relying on women and private memories but also setting them apart.\textsuperscript{54}

As suggested in the earlier quote by Dale Spender, other scholars have shown how the “formidable legal, moral, and social structures, reinforced by countless images and texts, reified the private, not the public, sphere as the ‘natural’ milieu for all classes of women.”\textsuperscript{55} In this assignment, women for centuries were denied access to or discouraged from accessing publicly held records. A legacy of this barrier was that membership in the early historical and genealogical societies was out of the question for women, and the reading rooms of the first truly public places holding records were restricted to men.\textsuperscript{56} In short, a “gendered history”\textsuperscript{57} created a world where men were considered the public spokespeople, and women, the private spokespeople, for the past.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the private role of women as family record keepers was transformed by the founding of sex-segregated patriotic societies, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and by the slow but continuing welcoming of women within the male-dominated genealogical and historical


\textsuperscript{57} Gerda Lerner, \textit{The Creation of Patriarchy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 238; Bonnie G. Smith, \textit{The Gender of History}.
societies. In these latter groups, women became the workers, rather than the leaders, or the secretaries rather than the presidents, but they became very visible public stewards of the past.

Within the National Genealogical Society (NGS, established 1903), early presidents, with some exceptions, were men, but other leadership roles were shared, thus creating a rare community. 58 This sharing of leadership among men and women also has remained. In 2008, on the thirteen-person board of this group, men number six, and women seven, with top leadership positions all falling to women (Vice-President, Secretary and Past President), a ratio also even unusual today among organizations in the U.S. 59 A count of genealogists who have been authorized by the Board for Certification of Genealogists shows that women far outnumber men. Among certified genealogists, for example, in the areas studied on this project, four women and no men are listed as professional genealogists. 60

Family History's Numbers

Despite this gendered history, genealogy has been called “the most public of all history, an endeavor known in almost all families.” Whereas many families might visit a museum or a library, most people first learn the past from within the family. 61 A 1995 survey by Maritz Marketing Research showed that over forty-five percent of American adults, or 87.5 million people were interested in genealogy and almost 14 million of these

people were involved “a great deal in family history.” 62 In the late 1990s, a study in the journal *American Demographics* found that genealogy held some interest to as many as 113 million people. 63 *Time Magazine* named the pursuit of family history as one of the four most popular topics on the Internet in a 1999 cover article. 64 Among the most active websites, FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com report hundreds of thousands of daily users. 65 In one month in 2007, Media Matrix found that Ancestry.com had over 2.5 million unique site visitors viewing over 200 million pages, and over 825,000 paid subscribers. 66 While some people dispute these numbers, 67 the most authoritative uncontested pronouncement is one that states simply that genealogy is a very popular pastime in the United States. 68

---


66 Jan Alpert, President of the National Genealogical Society (NGS), email to author, April 16, 2008.

67 Dick Eastman, “How Popular is Genealogy?” *Eastman’s Online Genealogy Newsletter*, January 11, 2006, http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2006/01/how_popular_is_.html (accessed April 10, 2008). Eastman notes that other countries with smaller populations attracted more people to genealogy conferences. The annual Family History Show in London typically attracted 2,500 to 3,000 attendees; the Biennale de Généalogie in Paris in December 2004 attracted more than 20,000 attendees; and the smaller Congrès de la Fédération Française de Généalogie hosted annually in different cities in France always attracts 3,000 to 5,000 French men and women. In U.S. national conferences on family history, attendees number only 1,500 or 1,600 persons. In addition, Eastman compares the dollars spent on sports magazines, for example, as far surpassing the money spent on genealogical magazines.

68 Alpert (email to author, April 16, 2008) stated that the Association of Professional Genealogists includes over 1,800 professional genealogists; the Board for Certification of Genealogists has certified over 300 genealogists; NGS has approximately 10,000 individual members and more than 675 organizational members including local, state and regional genealogical societies and local and state libraries; and the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) has more than 650 member societies. FGS believes their combined membership is over 1 million individuals interested in genealogy. The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) includes 75 member organizations representing 10,000 individuals.
Within archives and libraries, family history researchers often make up the largest user group. Most studies show that family historians make up from forty-five to ninety percent of all archival researchers. Though statistical breakdowns about the types of users are not routinely collected or made available, most archivists believe that the numbers of family history researchers have grown in the last thirty years and will continue to grow. In 2007, the U.S. National Archives in Washington, D.C., estimated that 80 percent of the users in their microfilm reading rooms were genealogists. The Alabama Department of Archives and History reported eighty-nine percent of their users were family historians in 2008. The Louisiana State Archives similarly reports that “80 to 90 percent” of users are genealogists. Almost two thousand people per day visit the Family History Library in Salt Lake City; in 2008, this meant some 600,000 visitors per

---


71 Diane L. Dimkoff, Microfilm Reading Room Monthly Totals, email to author, March 16, 2007.

72 Nancy Dupree, Senior Archivist, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery Alabama, telephone conversation, April 15, 2009. Alabama reported use by some 13, 846 people with 12, 342 of these being family historians in 2008.

73 Bill Stafford, Director of Reference Services, Louisiana Secretary of State, Archives Division, email to author, April 15, 2009.
year.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, over six million visitors yearly use the more than 4,500 Latter Day Saints’ local family history libraries around the world.\textsuperscript{75}

Writing of the U.S. in 1992, John J. Grabowski found that genealogists were “the fastest growing group of researchers in many repositories.” He listed use at the Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) in Cleveland, Ohio, as 151 percent more than it had been ten years previously, “most of this growth … genealogical in nature…. Approximately 75 percent of the people using the WRHS library on any given day are pursuing family history research.” Similarly he found that “the bulk of research use with local governmental records” rested with “genealogists.”\textsuperscript{76} This growth among family historians as users has continued, though many of the new users access portals via the Internet.\textsuperscript{77}

**Album Makers’ Numbers**

Heritage album makers are considered a subset within family historians. They form only one of the 600 categories listed on Cyndi’s List of Genealogical Sites on the Internet.\textsuperscript{78} In some respects, they are on the farthest boundaries of the interest in family history, often never attached to any organized group studying genealogy. Among the heritage album makers studied for this project, twenty-five of twenty-six interviewees were self-taught in genealogy. They make their heritage albums usually either alone or


among women who are engaged in making scrapbooks of all types. They see themselves and their work as part of a community of memory-making. Studying them, one learns how records are used and created outside the archives.

Album makers’ practices are also considered here for comparative purposes as one looks at varying methods of transmitting memories and shaping collective memories. Over twenty-five million persons in the U.S. consider themselves to be scrapbookers, with one million of these being men, and the rest women. Thus they form an even more clearly gendered grouping than do family historians.

Thirty percent of all U.S. households are said to hold one scrapbook maker.\textsuperscript{79} One industry report suggests that scrapbook makers are 98\% female, 85\% Caucasian, and 63\% married with children living at home.\textsuperscript{80} According to the Hobby Industry Association and to album makers themselves, scrapbooking remains one of the most popular hobbies of the early twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed album making is an industry unto itself. Its 2.6 billion dollar income in 2007 made news in the scrapbooking blog, Life Preservers Scrapbook Club.\textsuperscript{82} At the other end of the world of publishing, the \textit{Wall Street Journal} also found impressive that:

From 1998 to 2004, scrapbooking grew from a $350 million minor hobby fueled by mom-and-pop stores to a $2.6 billion business with goods in big-box stores.


and crafting chains like Archiver’s and ReCollections, with products like $14.99 color-coordinated papers by Die Cuts with a View and $12.95 “goodie box” stickers by Doodlebug Design.  

An interest in genealogy is almost routinely cited as one of the reasons for the beginning of scrapbooking’s popularity, with the 1976 publication of the Alex Haley’s novel and the 1977 television series *Roots*, appearing as a marker on timelines. About 75 percent of scrapbook manufacturers are based in Utah, which is not surprising, given the role genealogy plays in religious life there, and the need to place family history in some form that allows display. On the other hand, the most often discussed of the vendors of albums is Creative Memories, a Minnesota-based direct sales company that recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary.

While all scrapbookers do not make heritage albums, heritage album makers very much live within the world of this popular craft. Heritage albums are considered one of the most important of all scrapbooks to make. This emphasis is promoted by the religious right, and Mormonism in particular, which perceive women as guardians of the home. Such views are essentialist ones, dividing the sexes along strictly defined lines, yet album makers, also, discuss their domains of memory as equivalent to, or preferred over, existing authorized (often male, as they see it) versions of the past.

---

83 Crow, “Scrapbook Industry Woos Male Crafters.”
85 Crow, “Scrapbook Industry Woos Male Crafters.”
86 Ibid.
87 Lightle and Anderson, *The Creative Memories*, 139.
Introduction to the Chapters

The chapters that follow elaborate on the above themes and tell more about family historians, album makers, and their memory practices. Chapter Two concerns the social world that creates family history. Borrowing from the domesticity of the private albums and the hierarchical functions initially served by genealogy, the layers of memories, practices, and meanings are detailed in this chapter to explore the transmission, recontextualization, and pluralization of records by family history.

Chapter Three introduces an American history of family history, and the various forms it has taken, including the album. The writings consulted address the types of knowledge people have had and have today in order that they may use and create records about families.

Chapter Four, entitled “Research Design and Methodology,” gives information on ethnographic work in general and the specific groups and individuals studied in particular. Fieldwork, archival research, and in-depth interviewing were all a part of this work. Participant-observation, along with textual analysis, offered preparation for fifty-two interviews.

Chapter Five, “Family Historians,” and Chapter Six, “Heritage Album Makers,” present the findings from these interviews. Here are descriptions of the two groups of record keepers, the processes of their work; their choices in words, practices, and communities; their motivations; and their movement between public and private records and recordkeeping.

Chapter Seven, “The Transmission and Pluralization of Records,” explores the workings of collective memory by offering two examples of the movement between
public and private sources over centuries. This section also considers the ongoing negotiation of memory in time and space and its dynamic function in the lives of various groups.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion, answers Barbara Reed’s question, “What is an archival role in shaping collective memory,” by describing possible roles archives holding family history records could adopt in service to researchers and society. Future topics of study are also suggested.

Limits and Contributions of the Study

Learning family history is often thought of as a gift, and so too is writing what has been learned about this memory practice. Attendant upon any such sharing, however, are restrictions of time, space, and cost. The first limitation here is one of geography: this study focuses on the practice of recordkeeping in the United States and the lived experiences of family history, primarily in Louisiana and Alabama. The second limitation is one of discipline, restricting the main analysis of the study to the framework of archival science.

The value of these restrictions is a greater focus on named and explored processes concerned with records. In the give-and-take among themselves, their legacies, and their movement between private and public sources, family historians and album makers demonstrate ways that public records are used and private records are created. This focus on records also illuminates conceptualizations of archives in general, and the means by which records are transmitted. The study then is cognizant especially of the transformations of environments where access to records and communication about

records occur. The description of these *milieux*, these places and the work in these places, is central to the study. They are considered as part of family history’s settings, a word chosen not only to tell about surroundings but also to suggest the overall crafting of cultures, here of communities of records.

Taken as a whole, this exploration contributes new insights into those ideas that archivists share with others who use and create records. For Anna and Joseph, with whom this chapter began, recordkeeping and records’ use are influenced by gender and migration. Yet these attributes have rarely been studied in relation to archival work.90 Similarly, knowing the work of people like Anna and Joseph adds another dimension to previous studies that have found “two players,” involved in the use of records, one who is the political player using records as “symbolic assets” and the other who is a professional, with a goal of “cultural capital.”91 This work argues for a third player, one who has remained positioned, but obliquely so, as the foundation of public history. In investigation of the memory practices of this latter “player,” the study then also adds to what is known about archival use, and presents a model for others who wish to focus on the theory and practice of recordkeeping outside the walls of the archives.

People like Anna and Joseph are the starting point on the journeys of so many others into the past. It is time now that their access to this past is understood.
