The most public of all history: family history and heritage albums in the transmission of records

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CHAPTER TWO

LAYERS OF MEMORIES, PRACTICES, AND MEANINGS

With a Middle Western American family, no sooner do you begin to perceive the extent of the proliferation of ancestors backward into time than they are lost from sight. Every trace of them disappears, through the simple erosion of human forgetfulness. They were in movement in a new country. The women were committed to drudgery and died young. The men had no proper tools to farm with, and weren’t good farmers anyway.... With their minds always on some promised land, like the Old Testament figures they so much resembled, they did not bother to record or even remember the place of their origin.

In my Grandmother Maxwell’s scrapbook, under the heading “Maxwell Fuller’s Own Grandfather,” there is an account of his life, in her handwriting. It is maddening. She must have known something about his early years, but what she put down is what she found in print (as if that alone was dependable) in a history of Logan County, published in 1886.

Most of the things I would like to know, my father could have told me [but].... He did not like to be interrupted in the middle of his narrative.¹

Like these above words, this project considers processes of omissions, inclusions, desires. This three-sided framework concerns the accumulations of records or the “layers” of records over time, which, in turn make new records, and the people and technologies that make them. In this chapter, first discussed is this choice of the word “layers” used by album makers and family historians to reflect upon their accumulations of records, as well as more subtle distinctions they make in the hierarchy of who can

know the past, and what past is known. Considered next are layers of recordkeeping within archivistics and other fields, and a review of readings showing different perspectives on family history and album making. Included here are definitions of transmission, recontextualization, and pluralization—the latter two forming the larger definition of the first to make possible the transfer of records from archives to person, person to person, or in any number of other directions as legacies to future generations.

Thirdly considered are influences that have shaped the accessibility of family history records at different times by different people: available technologies, levels of expertise, gender roles, and migration. Finally considered are social practices that are shaped around the creation of particular kinds of family histories.

Why introduce family historians and album makers through such considerations? Because family history is shaped by a desire to remember, and because “layer,” “layering,” or “multi-layered” processes are persistent metaphors among those who work with memory. Freud’s choice of layers, the remaining trace on the “mystic writing pad,” is often called forth. So too are other compelling deployments of the layers of memories. In archival science, Jeannette Bastian speaks of the need to see many layers, to uncover layers, and to draw parallels between layers. Verne Harris urges “the peeling back of layers,” within his argument that “interrogation of the file is about context—

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3 Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 84, 208, 212, 258; Draaisma, Metaphors of Memory, 7, 8, 9, 21, 27, 45, 103, 111, 190, 202; Schudson, Watergate in American Memory, 217; van Dijck, Mediated Memories, 5.

4 Jeannette Allis Bastian, “Placing Archives in the Memory Continuum: Remembering The Homestead Strike of 1892,” The First International Conference on the History of Records and Archives: Conference Programme and Participants’ Papers (Toronto: Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, 2003), 86.
context to the text which the researcher reads in the file. Any reading of the text without this accompanying peeling back of layers of intervention and interpretation will be deeply flawed.” In a rich statement, metaphoric in its own layering, Harris emphasizes that “Here, precisely, is the heart of archival endeavour—disclosure of context.” Thus in this project, “layers” is also used to show the enormity of family history—its dissenting aspects, as well as its mainstream, its plentiful records and its underbelly of oral accounts, its transgressive acts of privilege-seeking within democracy, its positivist background, its populist traditions welcoming and tolerant across many boundaries—all these influences that themselves are not easily contained.

Such layers are addressed in the chapter’s beginning excerpts, which come from the novelist William Maxwell in his autobiographical book entitled *Ancestors*. Like others interested in family history described in subsequent chapters, Maxwell chose the local setting as an organizing theme. Unlike some family historians studied here, he inhabited a landscape in which migration did not nurture the creation of records. In his account, other circumstances influenced remembering: a people convinced of a promised land but too tired to write at the end of the day, the eclipse of the private memory by the published local history, and the narrative selectively recalled.

**Layers**

For Maxwell and many memory practitioners, family history is “an iterative process,” an ongoing search that builds question upon question. In their vocabularies, family historians and album makers borrow from the status-linked functions initially

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6 Duff and Johnson, “Where is the List with All the Names,” 94; Yakel, “Seeking Information, Seeking Connections”; Yakel and Torres, “Genealogists as a Community of Records,” 102.
served by genealogy and the domesticity of the private albums. They speak of a universe
where records and accounts are ordered and transmitted, one above the other, or one
moved here or there. They compile genealogies; they craft collages. They order new
information in relation to what is already known. They also represent their findings in a
variety of formats: some linearly laid out on pages, some in trees branching in various
directions, some in entirely different fashions. They choose to study a particular ancestor
for reasons as diverse as locating all the wearers of a particular christening gown or
wedding veil, as practical as choosing the side of the family where most information can
be found, or as corrective as selecting only those in a matriarchal line. For them, the
statement of Michael Young in *The Metronomic Society* prevails: “The cyclical depends
on the linear as much as the linear depends on the cyclical.”

To one leader in the
genealogical community, the search always involves something like “chains of DNA …
endlessly twisted coils ... [that] make sense only when we learn to read the string,
interpreting both the parts and the whole.” Maxwell employed the metaphor of the
“kaleidoscope” with its fragments of colorful pebbles shifting within a tube of mirrors, to
represent different versions of the past that can be made in the present. One of the main
purposes of the work of family historians and album makers is to evaluate these
configurations, and in so doing to add to the existing knowledge about families, to
contribute what they often call their own “layer.”

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At the most basic level, this increment of records is both a consequence and an example of archivalization: “the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving.”11 Family historians and album makers decide to collect materials, and they use materials that have been collected. Here there is a continuum of reciprocity where oral accounts, personal and official practices come together to define what counts as a representation of the past. Family historians and album makers also create new materials and make new records, a process by which the past and present become part of one another.12

Archivalization and later phases in genealogical inquiries are considered stages within collective memory, i.e., the socially organized or mediated representation of the past created via socially produced artifacts, and held in common by a group.13 Knowledge of a family’s past is created via various institutions and individuals in adjustments dependent neither solely on the powers of the state (in public records) nor on dedicated memory forms (in private records) nor on traditions and lived experiences, but in the mediation between and incorporation of all these forms.

Collective memory formation can be compared to the formation of records, an analogy that extends the interpretation that archival science can find in studying family history practices. Family historians and album makers both seek and create “persistent representations,” and they have “prototypes” in particular inscribed records and the more distantly associative “not-quite records” of family albums and oral accounts, to apply one

encompassing definition of records from Geoffrey Yeo. Like record formation, memory formation also displays “recursive processes” embodying “multivalent temporality,” that is, the “simultaneous presence of multiple chronologies and contexts in a single document or body of documents.” Creation, capture, classification, and other steps are recursive, potentially located along “multiple pathways” in Brien Brothman’s schemata as “a helical model” that is always complexly located in various mediating points.

The notions of public and private also cross various boundaries similarly aligned in understandings of record formation and memory studies. Public records, those held in publicly-accessible institutions, sometimes become private records when they are recontextualized in the creations of family historians and album makers. Private records, what in North America are generally called “private or personal papers,” often become public when they are donated to a repository or added to a website. These considerations of public and private as concerned with use and access follow the thinking of Tom Nesmith who wrote, “A public record, created by social and technical processes of inscription, transmission, and contextualization, is an evolving mediation of understanding about some phenomena which a given society deems to be in the public domain.”

The context of records changes their status, and thus changes “what they are.” His example is that of women’s records, once considered not worthy of placement in archives at all, since women were outside the official historical realm. Their records were not transmitted to archives, or were not retained in such a way that they became part of


the inscribed past.\(^{17}\) That is one reason this study addresses those women who work with memories that are still not often transferred to the public realm situated within archives.

**Literature Review: Family History from the Perspective of Archivists and Librarians**

Archival and library science literature in general has presented layers of meanings pertaining to family history. Before the late 1990s, as Elizabeth Yakel points out, librarians and archivists “largely conceptualize[d] genealogical research from a managerial perspective.”\(^{18}\) Underneath this perspective were scattered writings on the history of genealogy, and some acknowledgement of the centrality of genealogists among the users of archives and libraries. Microfilm, the growth of the Latter Day Saints libraries around the U.S., and the first manuals from the 1930s onward all brought attention to genealogists as the most numerous among archival and library users.\(^{19}\) In the late twentieth century, an interest in social history made acceptance of genealogists one of the key managerial problems Yakel named, but also widened the approaches to considering family historians.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., 144.


In the 1970s and 1980s, many archivists and librarians came to write about the expanding communities of genealogists. A number of writers addressed attempts to deal with lingering stereotypes—usually ones characterized as elderly women not prepared for earnest research.21 Other writers acknowledged that family historians had never been the most valued researchers, acknowledged the alignment of archivists and librarians with historians that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.22

Hugh Taylor, writing in the 1980s, was one of the first to recognize areas where archivists and genealogical researchers were meeting together for mutual benefit.23 Similarly, Robert Warner found genealogists to be significant players in the intense five-year period from 1980 to 1985 called the National Archives Independence Movement.24 As Phebe Jacobsen observed in 1981, archivists began to question a hierarchy of users where family historians were relegated to the back of the line.25 In a late 1980s’ study, Rhianna Helen Edwards examined responses to family historians in archives to see if an increased interest in social history, the intense popularity of the 1976 novel and 1977 television film *Roots*, and the lobbying power of a growing user group had made any

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change in these attitudes towards family historians. She found that some change had occurred, but only marginally.\(^{26}\)

International attention focused on this changing milieu for genealogy in a 1992 special issue of *Archivum*. Giving more insight into the history of genealogy in different cultures than to services in archives, this issue, nevertheless, brought cross-cultural information on family history.\(^{27}\) Rosemary Boyns pointed in another direction suggesting that the rich social history of the era should make archivists interested in family historians. She found then positive change in greater willingness by archivists to work with genealogists in the United Kingdom.\(^{28}\) In the same period, Christopher Barth looked specifically to new services, finding that genealogists would be well served by more finding aids online and digitization projects.\(^{29}\) Christie Wood studied the demographics of the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society, 1969–2004, pointing out, however, that the new genealogy had not brought much positive reception in archives to family historians.\(^{30}\) Another recent study, by Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson, acknowledged the need to see processes of work among genealogists. Duff and Johnson argued for online retrieval systems that allowed access not only through finding aids but also through names, places, types of documents, interactive maps, and Boolean searching—ways family historians searched.\(^{31}\) Yakel and Deborah Torres followed closely, identifying genealogists’ searches for meaning, connections, and strategies that offered insight into memory

\(^{26}\) Edwards, “Archivists’ Outlook on Service.”

\(^{27}\) Special Issue on Archives and Genealogical Sciences, *Archivum* 37 (1992).


\(^{31}\) Duff and Johnson, “Where is the List with All the Names,” 80–81, 94–95.
formation among this important user group, and their communal and individual endeavors.\textsuperscript{32}

Michael Moss concentrated too on the meanings of family records, inherent in the paths of so many people to the past, even though, “most … ancestors have left only the shallowest footprints on its surface; a name in a directory, a poor law register, a census or a list of emigrants.”\textsuperscript{33} Hannah Little also addressed such topics as she explored the nature of authenticity and the link between genealogy and identity. Using the background of Scottish tourism designed around family history, she asked questions of heritage itself. For whom, are programs about heritage useful? What roles do archives play in the construction of identities? Most critically for this study, Little spoke of the value of an awareness of “uses of records beyond the point of creation—their use as memorials, as sites of spiritual value and forgetting, their use in the construction of the self and sense of community, their role in the imagination and consumerism.”\textsuperscript{34} Like Louise Craven in her edited volume *What are Archives?*, Little asked readers to consider what about records “fascinates”—specifically in the context of family history.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, Scott Lucas investigated how genealogists search for information, and then designed an information-seeking model that tells the stages genealogists work through to find materials in libraries.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Yakel, “Seeking Information, Seeking Connections”; Yakel and Torres, “Genealogists as a ‘Community of Records,’” 93–113.
\textsuperscript{34} Hannah Little, “Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever: Coming Home to Scottish Archives,” *Archivaria* 64 (Fall 2007): 112.
\textsuperscript{36} Scott Anthony Lucas, “The Information Seeking Processes of Genealogists” (PhD diss., Emporia State University, 2008).
In two essays, Eric Ketelaar has detailed forms and processes of earlier family history. In one work, he describes steps towards a “patrimonial consciousness” beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the subsequent perceptions of archives as part of this patrimony developing “first in the private sphere.” In another essay, he writes of the “genealogical gaze” arising earlier and continuing in Tuscany, especially in Florence, but also in England and the Netherlands. The family archives in various forms were shown to again represent the “permeable” at times “nonexistent” boundaries of “public and private memories and archives.”

These boundaries are shifting too in today’s world. As Richard Cox reminds archivists, the huge growth of personal archives means that “new partnerships with the public” will be forged. In these partnerships, Cox explores a host of writers who like Yakel, Ketelaar, Yakel and Torres, Little, Craven, and Lucas all direct archival science readers to other disciplines to study how private record keepers have been considered. These works from other disciplines are interwoven in the chapters ahead.

**Literature Review: Albums and Private Memory Keeping about Families**

Whereas archival science has a body of work on family history, archivists have not devoted as much attention to the history of albums kept about family history. Thus, for background, one must include among the few works of archivists and librarians, studies by historians of print culture, anthropologists, art historians, and sociologists who

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have examined the functions and forms of albums.\textsuperscript{40} Primarily, these scholars describe albums as platforms from which to project images of the self, and stories of the past and present, for the future. In turn, album makers themselves are seen as active producers, historians as well as storytellers of their own lives.

Maurice Rickards was one of the first to position the history of albums on a road that extends from the first availability of printed matter to the present, from traditions of memorialization (in memory objects placed in early books), pedagogy (in the creation of commonplace books), and friendship and the circulation of poetry and literature (in the \textit{album amicorum}).\textsuperscript{41} Ann Moss, Frances Yates, James Kinneavy, and Kenneth Lockridge also added to this idea of a genealogy of the album in which commonplace books served as mnemonic tools and vehicles for self-expression.\textsuperscript{42}

In this same sort of tradition, Ketelaar described not only the late middle ages and early Renaissance "genealogical gaze," but also the \textit{ricordanze} in which to keep family records. These books combined elements of a commonplace book, an account book, a chronicle and a diary\textsuperscript{43}—a rich subject discussed more in Chapter Three.

That similar forms and influences were present, albeit on a more modest scale, among early Americans, has been the subject of Peter Benes, Georgia Brady Barnhill, Maureen A. Taylor, and others in their study of "genealogical artifacts in New England"

\textsuperscript{40} For a bibliography of these works see Danielle Bias, Rebecca Black, and Susan Tucker, "Scrapbooks and Albums, Theories and Practice: An Annotated Bibliography," Tulane University, http://www.newcomb.tulane.edu/~wclib/susan.html (accessed March 10, 2009).
\textsuperscript{43} Ketelaar, "The Genealogical Gaze," 10.
and Pennsylvania. Like the *ricordanze*, these registers and painted family trees are discussed in Chapter Three as prized possessions of early record keepers. Family records and family albums to hold these records have also been studied by those interested in the invention of chromolithography at the end of the eighteenth century, and the invention of photography in 1837.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the words “album” and “scrapbook” have been used interchangeably in function, in conversation, and in scholarly writing. Ronald and Mary Zboray see albums as “boundary blurring objects,” akin to, and often used to serve the same functions as, diaries, commonplace books, journals, and especially scrapbooks. Yet, as literary critic Patricia Buckler argues, these types of documents have varying levels of privacy—with diaries being the most private, and ledgers and albums being the most public. The New England Historic Genealogical Society has never had an official name for these albums but an archivist there, Tim Salls, calls them “scrapbook genealogies.” These isolated forms generally were included within larger collections representing connections to travel, learning, and possessions, and thus were often eclipsed in descriptions and in access. No scholar has ever studied this form focused solely on the family.

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Instead, scholars of family life have devoted attention to the photograph album, probably because photographs themselves proved a less cumbersome subject than scattered memorabilia layered within a book. Bound books to hold photos appeared in the 1850s and, according to Elizabeth Siegel, quickly spread. By the 1870s rare indeed was a middle-class home without such a volume. Photographic albums were first created to allow people to amass the images of notable people. However, Marilyn Motz creatively compared these earlier albums to later forms, showing how women altered conventional poses, settings, and clothing to give an individualistic view of themselves outside and within expected societal conventions. Buckler and Kay Leeper’s work on one scrapbook from the 1840s also shows the appropriation of the wider culture into a personalized form, as women accumulated, sorted, and pasted materials related to marriage, motherhood, virtue, religion, and politics.

Ellen Gruber Garvey’s work over the last decade has consistently shown how advertising and the development of a consumer society contributed to scrapbook making. Though she does not devote attention to family scrapbooks per se, her work is significant in describing how various groups re-circulated ideas about themselves and their beliefs, and notably, for this project, how mourning for the dead of the Civil War was preserved in albums.

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Similarly, Roger Lane used scrapbooks to write a history of race in Philadelphia. As his starting point, Lane used the scrapbooks of African-American William Dorsey to show the building of collective memory among African Americans in the city. During the years 1870 to 1923, Dorsey compiled some 338 scrapbooks and 914 biographical files, more than half of which were devoted to people of color.\(^{53}\)

Archivists and librarians initially concerned themselves with the conservation of albums and the history of bindings, rather than insights into the contents of such works. Robert DeCandido provided an overview of assemblage problems.\(^ {54}\) Similarly, Richard Horton traced various styles of albums, beginning with a common, unstubbed blank book in the 1850s.\(^ {55}\) Jane Rutherston found that the bulk of British patents for albums and scrapbooks dated from 1860 to 1900.\(^ {56}\)

More recently, archivists have studied the scrapbooks of other marginalized groups in order to show how individuals created a discourse about their communities that can be found in no other place. Carol Bowers, for example, analyzed the scrapbook of a prostitute in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Wyoming; and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin analyzed the scrapbooks of a depression-era teenager in West Virginia.\(^ {57}\) Bowers and Melvin show the varied influences on scrapbook making:

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desire to present the self in a favorable light, as well as to reflect on goals dependent on knowledge of the outside world.

Deborah Smith and Juliana Kuipers have also looked at scrapbooks from the perspective of library science and archivistics. Smith argued that album making was a reaction to capitalism. Introduced to huge amounts of colorful paper for the first time, mid nineteenth-century Europeans and North Americans crafted documents in which they shared hopes and wishes, as well as knowledge of products. Smith argued that album making was a reaction to capitalism. Introduced to huge amounts of colorful paper for the first time, mid nineteenth-century Europeans and North Americans crafted documents in which they shared hopes and wishes, as well as knowledge of products.58 Juliana Kuipers followed this theme, urging that visual literacy skills be required of archivists who deal with these “intriguing combination of diaries, photograph albums, and ephemera.”59 Kuipers’ ideas, like my work with Katherine Ott and Patricia Buckler, link scrapbooks and quilts as still relatively unexplored sources for researchers interested in women’s history.60

Others, too, see album making as one lens from which to interpret gender and memory. Despite the fact that some men made albums, girls and women have a long history of album making. Todd Gernes, for example, has shown that girls and women came to be associated with friendship albums.62 Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell also reported that people who were shown a century-old scrapbook described its maker as a “she.”63 Compiling scrapbooks of trade cards was also associated with girls, according to Garvey.64

62 Gernes, “Recasting the Culture of Ephemera,” v, 62.
The most well-known writing on gender, memory, and the keeping of family records comes from Pierre Bourdieu. He credits the “sexual division of labour” as giving the wife in a family “the responsibility of maintaining relations with members of the group who live a long way away.” One of the means of doing so is in the sending of photographs. Moreover, Bourdieu considers “the family photograph” as part of “a ritual of the domestic cult in which the family is both subject and object,” an important recognition if one is considering who controls private memory forms. Bourdieu also describes “the celebratory sense which the family group gives to itself” in sharing family accounts through images, an observation which would be recognizable to family historians and album makers studied here who share albums with kin and neighbors.

Transmission

This connecting function of family history and these past interests by scholars concern the transmission of knowledge through various forms and genres. But transmission, archivally defined around records, itself is important in other ways as well. Access to records, public or private, is predicated most basically on the arrival of records in archives. Transmission is considered, from diplomatics, as the transfer of a record from one party to another. Transmission’s definition in memory studies concerns both passage and receipt of some representation of the past, and thus concerns a social act, the

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giving of a memory from one person to another.\textsuperscript{67} Family historians and album makers, like the forms of memory texts themselves, “mediate” this transmission.\textsuperscript{68}

Heretofore, in archivistics, transmission has been either assumed (in that a record would not exist if it had not been a part of a preserved transaction transmitted at some point), or subsumed in discussions of authenticity or provenance.\textsuperscript{69} But the transmission of records should be understood here as one facet of public history and, as Nesmith and postmodernists theorists believe, one part of mediation and a communication process.\textsuperscript{70}

This type of transmission can be wedded to a Victorian translation of Francis Bacon’s seventeenth-century \textit{ars tradendi} to signify “that what we know depends on the practices of communication by which the knowledge comes to us.”\textsuperscript{71} As Nesmith states, “what we know is mediated by our representations of it, with all their strengths and limitations.”\textsuperscript{72}

These more capacious definitions of transmission also follow an idea articulated by Paul Connerton in the 1980s that an understanding of the social formation of memory must include knowledge of those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible.\textsuperscript{73} These acts of transfer are today accomplished via a vernacular knowledge of family records, undertaken by people who display richly textured levels of purposes and meaning-making as they compile both memory and evidence. These acts of transfer are also today subject to many and increasing social and technological practices that mediate what becomes public or private, and that mediate the democratization of sources, the

\textsuperscript{67} Irwin-Zarecka, \textit{Frames of Remembrance}, 176.
\textsuperscript{68} van Dijck, \textit{Mediated Memories}, 15–26.
\textsuperscript{70} Nesmith, “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate,” 143.
\textsuperscript{72} Nesmith, “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate,” 144.
\textsuperscript{73} Paul Connerton, \textit{How Societies Remember} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.
public nature of history. In family history work, new context is added upon old context and transmitted as part of a collective. Records are received; they are interpreted and passed on.

Most North American archivists understand records as involving both the creation of records within a particular agency or by a particular person and the passage of the records from an active to an inactive state. U.S. archivists consider this as “transmittal,” whereas Canadians have integrated more consistently ideas from diplomatics concerned with archival use, and thus employ the word “transmission.” But North Americans overall, if they consider transmission again after disposition in an archives, look towards authenticity, care to preserve the trail of provenance, and relationships to other records as “the archival bond.” They generally neglect how this bond grows after the transmission of the records to archives.

In a diplomatic sense, transmission historically had to do with translation since ecclesiastical records particularly required wide dissemination in other languages. Transmission in an electronic environment of records requires other definitions, similar
to translation, but complicated by the series of changes in a record that potentially can be made in seconds.

In both the older and newer meanings of transmission, it becomes associated with “use” and, according to Yakel, “the idea that access [to records] is important.” Like the overarching purposes of archives, the transmission of records creates and maintains communities, insures continuity, and at the same time, influences methods for change and the creation of new information, new knowledge.79

Writings from anthropology assist in the expansion of these archival concepts concerning transmission. In the 1950s, anthropologist Laura Bohannen observed that an understanding of transmission allowed consideration of a story’s changes over time, and “selective forgetting.” Later, Jan Vansina informed readers about the “chain” of tellers, mnemonic devices, and awareness of distortions and veracity in oral accounts in general including family history.82 Vansina’s assistance to Roots’ author, Alex Haley, just when he was about to give up pursuit of his African ancestors makes the anthropologist’s public crossing into the understanding of transmission all the more relevant to this project.83 In other ways, key phrases from anthropology such as Elizabeth Tonkin’s “representations of pastness” rather than “history” aid in the suggestion of how to

approach modifications shaping accounts over time.\textsuperscript{84} Social transmission, Tonkin observed, should not be studied without attention to conditions of production and aesthetic practices.\textsuperscript{85} In a study of family trees as ethnographic shorthand, Mary Bouquet adds to the history of the visual depiction of lineage, its own transmission of information among both professionals and the general public.\textsuperscript{86} Bouquet’s work is helpful since she observed that “While the genealogical method seems to separate the biological from the social and cultural constructions of kinship,” doing so is not “neutral.” Instead, available forms influence the stories as they are passed among people. The form of the family tree is illustrative of change as well as stasis. The tree affords a universal symbol,\textsuperscript{87} but another aspect of contextual transmission is there too, hidden. Earlier family trees placed the head of the family at the top, or in the middle of the tree.\textsuperscript{88} The current shape of the family tree suggests an accommodation of a new form of transmission, a hierarchy in which the ground is seen as the logical starting point. Online family trees give instantaneous transmission to other branches, other families, other trees—demonstrating kinship’s movement across space and time.\textsuperscript{89}

Transmission as a concern of social memory fits within a genealogy of its own—descended from Maurice Halbwach’s \textit{Les Cadres de la Mémoire} (1925) and \textit{La Mémoire Collective} (1950) to contemporary interdisciplinary memory studies. The work of Daniel

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{85} Elizabeth Tonkin, and Harvey Whitehouse, “Memory and Social Transmission,” \textit{Anthropology Today} 11, no. 5 (October 1995): 23–24.
\bibitem{88} Maureen A. Taylor, “Tall Oaks from Little Acorns Grow: The Family Tree Lithograph in America,” in Simons and Benes, \textit{The Art of Family}, 75–76.
\end{thebibliography}
R. Woolf is especially helpful since he characterized personal, community, and social memory in early modern England as necessary to collective memory. The first was often transmitted orally; the second was performed (that is, transmitted in other ways as the aggregate of experiences); and the third was “mediated” in some “narrative form.”

Technology today enables transmission also in a mixing of forms. Memory becomes both “a product and a process,” as noted in Chapter One; or as José van Dijck states, the “versatility and morphing quality of digital memory machines” affords “a positive element that is integral to human reminiscing.”

Technology enables the individual creator and the individual user or reader to stand together as “a centre and medium of this never ending process of translation.” This translation is again about access and use, akin to a metaphoric translation that occurs in generations of records use. This translation also underscores Ketelaar’s statement that memory texts arise from a combination of public and private interfaces, from archival and embodied dimensions. Further too, Roger Chartier reminds us that electronic transmission changes “materiality.” The “computer screen … enables different types of texts to appear in front of the reader, texts that, in the world of the scribal and \textit{a fortiori} printed cultures, were distributed among distinct objects.” Electronic family records can be seen as very often accomplished in undifferentiated forms of records, with little maintenance of the context of their creations made apparent on computer screens. But

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91 van Dijck, \textit{Mediated Memories}, 163; Papalias, \textit{Genres of Recollection}, 16.
this was also true of transcriptions of records by hand, a centuries-old practice, thus
giving more past influences stacked within any understanding of transmission.

Recontextualization

Transcriptions uniformly privilege content over context. But even before that
stage, other layers of change have been added to transmitted records. In the exchange of
custodianship, recontextualization begins. It is always a part of transmission and in
subsequent chapters will be folded within a more unitary discussion of transmission. Yet,
definitions of its meaning should be considered. As Ketelaar notes,

Recontextualization … takes place at every stage of a record’s life and in every
dimension of the records continuum, adding values to (or subtracting values from)
the records as *semiophore*, to use Krzysztof Pomian’s term for museum artifacts.
Like the objects in a museum, records derive their significance from the different
“invisibles” they construct and from the ways in which they mediate these to
spectators or users.95

Curators give “shape and presence to history,” dehistoricize artifacts and art—or, give
them new layers of meanings.96 For this same reason, many archivists argue against
exhibitions of records.97 Likewise, they also usually see family history albums and other
family history forms as derivative, unoriginal, and not suitable for donations to archives.
For archivists, scrapbooks are neither manuscript, record, or book, but some hybrid
form.98 Albums are already recontextualized records, in other words.

Many family historians and album makers know well the prior movements of
their sources, and are also conscious that they are creating new context for the sources.

95 Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives,” 137.
1999), 73.
the SAA Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, on August 18, 2005); Margaret Hedstrom, “Archives,
Their “Bible” of information is called *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, and here one can learn about the forms of records created in different eras, how they were moved from this courthouse to that library, and other movements of creation, capture, and use.99 Album makers too concentrate on the arrangement of records as they choose what is easily retrieved. They call this “creativity” in knowing the past and transmitting it. Recontextualization, in these movements and this creativity, facilitates the insertion of the self into the records.

There follows a sense of ownership of records. The use of records is complemented by a belief that records are created in a communal sense for the people. Many family historians and album makers recall the 1973 Freedom of Information Act, increasing openness, transparency, and thus accountability in government. They also discuss issues of access before the Internet: few open hours at archives and libraries, laws against access to birth certificates, the cost of travel to distant repositories, etc. Their beliefs and the new possibilities for access form part of an overall movement of openness in records100 but also recontextualize ideas about records. In possession of records, the family historians and album makers are growing their personal archives. They bring then a change in the concept of “consignation” of records101 and authority over the past being restricted to the state and the academy. For family history keepers, both public and private spaces will keep the records needed for their work, and both will serve as places where their own records can be deposited or willed. Important for archivists are

considerations of where and under what circumstances these spaces are located. Clearly all personal archives will not come to repositories, yet they will have a public presence in other ways, and thus when showing family history, will tell a recontextualized history. Where will archivists stand in this sort of world and what sorts of assistance is needed?\textsuperscript{102}

**Pluralization**

Other sorts of transmission and recontextualization concern the redefinition of public and private in an age of technology. Disparate collections now can be joined online without being joined in actual location. This type of sharing involves yet assuring an authentic and reliable collective memory, which Australian archivists (and others) place as part of the pluralization dimension of the records continuum model. Pluralization, in this sense, enables “records to be reviewed, accessed and analyzed beyond an organization or individual life, for multiple external accountability and memory purposes in and through time and spaces.”\textsuperscript{103} Pluralization allows “the knowledge of events (in our case, reflected in records)” to be “communicated to social groups, creating shared experience and knowledge across communities.” Pluralization concerns the extension of records as collective memory within and beyond the archives.\textsuperscript{104}

Like transmission and recontextualization, pluralization concerns use, and is indeed dependent on these two other steps. Here, another layer becomes apparent since there are “inherent or potential rights of others in records,” and thus “challenges” to “the


\textsuperscript{104} Reed, “Beyond Perceived Boundaries,” 177–178.
notion of recordkeeping as existing within the domain of one single entity. Recordkeeping of this kind becomes a dynamic relationship to be managed across time.105 Family historians and album makers are centrally located as part of this dynamic relationship.

These memory practitioners “bring an exterior view into an archiving system.”106 They do so, as Hugh Taylor first articulated in the 1980s, by actively advising archivists about the use of records, contributing private records, acting as proponents for open records, and again, transmitting new records.107 But also today they do so by showing personal archives online. One such archives, that of Rick E. Barry, shows letters, photographs, records, and texts in a project he describes as an “ongoing exercise in personal electronic records.”108 In brief, he has recontextualized his family’s genealogy online to allow access to anyone who chooses to look.

Seeing and hearing about the steps involved in the creation of collective memory from these groups and these people, i.e., their layers, therefore has the power to enlarge the understanding of the records continuum. Studying family historians and album makers offers the chance to show how the “the record-keeping regimes” utilized and sometimes created by others (outside the archival profession) “carry” records “forward and enable their use for multiple purposes by delivering them to people living in different times and spaces.”109 To return to Brothman’s “helical curves of time,” dwelling and

106 Ibid., 182.
moving “along multiple pathways tracing numerous chronologies,” the records used and created in family history loop back and forth between various points from archives to publications to websites to family albums to various other stages of collective memory.

Yet, in studying memory practices of family history, pluralization also has other meanings with the potential to enrich an understanding of records. One meaning is found in the multiplicity of individuals from different backgrounds who have come to make up the U.S., again as part of migration, as well as the even more diverse people who use technology today. Media scholar Leah A. Lievrouw looks to this sort of joining of voices. Her queries concern technology’s affordances of “meaningful interaction, sociality and learning that institutions once provided, without making the same demands for broader ‘core solidarity’ or norm consensus embedded in traditional media and institutions.” In their podcasts, their wikis, their online scrapbooks, family historians and album makers promote a different environment of sharing than one would have in person, a layer again of change in information sharing across various boundaries. This sort of pluralization shows another example of records as “evidence of me” becoming “evidence of us” but the “us” is redefined, or pluralized.

Another pertinent meaning of pluralization comes because memory practitioners operate within environments that have increasingly allowed more and more proximity to records. This layer of meaning speaks then to some shortening of “the distance to power relationship.” As Geert and Geert Jan Hofstede in Culture’s Consequences note, the more democratic a society, the more any marginal population may feel empowered to speak up

for themselves to the powers-that-be. U.S. family historians and album makers believe that migration brought this type of society, this pluralization of voices, and lessened both the distance between their ancestors and those in power, and the distance between themselves and the records created by those in power.

Again, though, this pluralization loops back to another framework: a society that for much of its history rested on the systematic exclusion of civil liberties to many people—certainly to women and African Americans. For them, the distance from the lines of communication with the powerful was great. They were not often a part of the plurality heard by government. The work of family history, then, like the metaphor of a brotherhood of mankind first written about by the revolutionary fathers, is framed in an idiom of kinship that is constantly in need of revision.

**Influences**

The novelist Maxwell quoted at the beginning of this chapter understood these layers of memories, practices, and meanings on a personal level. Even simple impediments stop collective memory, as he noted in the reluctance of his father: “He did not like to be interrupted in the middle of his narrative.” That is always the danger of insider status: the bother of being disturbed in an established pattern. Collecting in a scrapbook as his grandmother did also did not yield the information he desired, for as Susan Stewart observes,

While the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the invention of memory, the point of the collection is forgetting—starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie.

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114 Maxwell, *Ancestors*, 300.
But therein too rests the appeal of family history: identities are not fixed, they are moving, as more and more records reveal new interpretations. The main influences on this “interruption” of old processes explored here and in later chapters are technology, levels of expertise with records, gender, and migration.

*Technology*

Throughout time, those interested in family history transmitted it in one form or another to subsequent generations, often in a dependency on technologies of reading and writing, and now including technologies of electronics (digitally reproducing texts, images, and sounds). Whether told in a story, a name, a gravestone, or digital photograph, recontextualized materials exist to keep some aspect of the past in the present. For example, in the early 1700s, the Virginian William Byrd II commissioned such a representation in a chart of 28 by 17.5 inches from the English College of Heralds. The Byrd pedigree remains today—the result of “an unidentified compiler” who had knowledge of family lineage and use of paint and parchment. But someone else also literally framed the chart, and someone else also copied it onto another sheet of paper. Someone donated it to the Virginia Historical Society. Here curators show that most other eighteenth-century genealogical information was also often recopied, incorporated into larger works, or placed with other papers. In the case of the well-to-do Virginians such as the Byrd family and their descendants, these derivatives and originals sat between other

116  Byrd Family Papers, 1684–1842, Mss1 B9968 a, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA. See also Byrd Family Papers, Mss6:2 B9965:1 (Katherine Wilkins, Reference Librarian, Virginia Historical Society, email to author, December 12, 2008). Wilkins noted, among others, the records of the Byrd Family Genealogy: Mss6:2 B9965:1, the Genealogical chart of the “Brid” (Bird and Byrd) family; Mss6:2 P4685:1, *Genealogia perantiquae et noblis Peytornorum familiae* [1684]; and Mss6:2 P4685:2, the Genealogical chart of the Peyton Family, compiled in 1688, Virginia Historical Society.
records about crops, correspondence with merchants, and, at times, the genealogical information of slaves.\textsuperscript{117} That researchers today have access to such works is due in large part to the copying and transcription efforts of antiquarians and genealogists.\textsuperscript{118} The reading rooms of libraries and archives across the U.S. contain many examples of such copying and transcription efforts, published in book form for limited readership. These layers of originals and derivatives, on a basic level, remain to us because of technologies of pen, pencil, inks, printing, and binding.

Introduced in the 1930s, the microfilming project of the Mormons was a similar extension. Besides showing the original record on film, the Mormons’ work enabled the use of records by millions of people. Public records once confined to particular repositories (immovable and therefore inaccessible to many people) could now be accessed as copies, could be transmitted to countless locations.

The technological revolution of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries further extends this transmission. The Internet and numerous electronic databases offer unprecedented access to records. Family historians and album makers use records online, and they create online communities that again reshape alignments and records. Both the record users and the records themselves become even more a part of a network that transmits, recontextualizes, and pluralizes. The record users add new layers—posting information on records, presenting their scanned copies, and linking their family history to other events, people, and a multiplicity of archives, public and private. They feed these layers back into the overall system.

\textsuperscript{117} Email from Katherine Wilkins to author, December 12, 2008.
Technology also has changed the position of the record in the hierarchy of authority. Science now may trump inscription on paper. Family historians themselves have long required a triangulation of data: three sources from records are considered their standard. Now one DNA test can be seen, at times, as the ultimate authority.  

*Levels of Expertise*

Writing, reading, and science are themselves dependent on the skills of people with various levels of expertise. One can divide them, as stated in Chapter One, between the hobbyists, the professional genealogists, the Mormons, the archivists, the librarians, the workers in the commercial firms providing databases, and others. One can also look at a hierarchy of knowers in other ways, based upon their knowledge of sources. As genealogist Elizabeth Shown Mills concludes there are “family-tree climbers” who work intent upon finding names and places without regard to standards of any sort; “traditional genealogists” who devote leisure time with attention to standards of the field; and “genealogical historians” who strive to portray each human life they study based upon available resources. Some of these latter two groups can become professional genealogists, certified through the Board for Certification in one or more of six categories of specialization.

Today all these different types of people practice within the parameters of what has been called the “new genealogy,” a term first used in the 1970s to show genealogy’s growth from “knowing the names and dates of ancestors” to wanting “to find out more about them, the things they did, the incidents that happened to them and the local

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backgrounds of their homes and places of work.”\textsuperscript{122} Yet the older forms of family history had cleared a path to the past that left various markers in the present. The late nineteenth century witnessed the appearance of the first professional historians who distanced themselves from family history.\textsuperscript{123} Library and archival policies followed this reasoning, adopting various prejudicial policies concerned with family historians well into the 1970s.\textsuperscript{124} The schism between history and genealogy in some ways has remained within American society, and certainly remains in some archives where historians are the preferred users.\textsuperscript{125} Even in the early 2000s, Laura Graham, writing about the Library of Congress’s digital American Memory Project, conceded that she and others had no idea that “the flow of content and information back to the Library of Congress from people who have local history, genealogical, or other specialized information to offer” would be so great in “enhancing descriptions of items in the institution’s collections.”\textsuperscript{126} Most likely, she had no idea because she did not know about genealogists, their numbers, and their ways of practice. Many family historians have an understanding of this uneasy friction between older meanings of family history and the remaining perceptions about their own skills and habits.\textsuperscript{127}

Most album makers, on the other hand, remain outside the library and archives, neither donors nor users. Yet, they form another grouping of people who consider themselves as memory keepers and experts on family records. They are ones to whom

\textsuperscript{122} FitzHugh, \textit{The Dictionary of Genealogy}, 10.
\textsuperscript{123} Mills, “Genealogy in the ‘Information Age,’” 260–278.
\textsuperscript{125} Tucker, “Visible Enough to Us.”
family history is often entrusted, the guardians of family items, that are usually considered “signposts of family history, which help family members re-experience crucial events and relationships they share.”

**Gender**

Gender creates another layer within the practices of knowing the past. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is, on the one hand, the centuries-long exclusion of women from groups controlling inscribed memory, and on the other, the long dependence on women as memorial tenders. There is also, at times, a tendency to see women as naturally endowed with the ability to remember. As the president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania argued in 1825 when admitting women to this group was first considered (and voted down), women were thought to have “superior memories,” and even acted as “living records of oral traditions.”

There was then a simultaneous marginalization and centrality of women as record keepers. Family historians and album makers look to names in samplers, quilts, other textile pieces, scrapbooks, and other artifacts. Here women’s roles could be blessed. Here women could be charged with naming practices, stories, and signs in various tangible forms. In such objects, women bent “legal notions that constricted women’s right to own property” and created “narratives lost in conventional political narratives, and writing— with a needle as well as a pen—[establishing] …identity beyond death.”

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131 Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, especially 1–4 on methodology.

Yet by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, family history came to offer one of the few endeavors that allowed women intellectual pursuits and leadership roles. Consider the work of Susa [sic] Young Gates, one of the daughters of Mormon leader Brigham Young. Gates became the principal organizer in the massive imperialistic empire of memory of the Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS). Because of her influence, family history still reaches more and more people. She established the first classes in genealogical methods, organized the women of the church to complete family histories and to serve as models for the way their sons should take over this work. She also pushed for adequate funding for the library in Salt Lake City, Utah. Known popularly as the thirteenth prophet, a distinctively different honor for a woman in a patriarchal church, Gates also made sure that the LDS library would be open to non-Mormons—a generosity, however potentially proselytizing, which would have far-reaching influence.133

Gates and her Mormon female followers were not alone in becoming public stewards of family memory and ancestry during the Progressive Era. Other middle-class women of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century worked through societies such as the Colonial Dames and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to take on similar roles across the U.S. Their efforts now figure in any number of monuments to the past, from trails showing the movements of ancestors, public displays of records and records’ use from their mammoth headquarters in Washington, D.C., to book groups and statues in small towns, to prizes and scholarships for countless

students. For years, too, the DAR chapters across the U.S. published “lineage books,” which served as a public venue for the works of women. Since the early 1900s local DAR units donated one copy of each of their publications to the public libraries in their jurisdiction.

Other genealogical societies formed since the 1970s are today made up of both men and women, but women remain in the majority. Women also undertake family history for different reasons than do men, reasons that impact transmission. Writing about a group of Canadian genealogists, Ronald D. Lambert found that women are more likely than men to come to family history wanting to:

know their ancestors as people, to go back in time in their imagination, to check a family history or mystery and to trace diseases in their family trees. They were also more likely to cite feelings of competence and the challenge of puzzles, as well as enjoyment in meeting living relatives and associating with other genealogists.... Men, on the other hand, were more likely to report that publishing a book or article and filling their spare time were important reasons.

In a 1980s’ survey, women were found to prefer the history of the family over the history of racial or ethnic groups, local communities, or national history more often than men did. These interests of women would be found today among almost all album makers. They form the “foundations of family history research,” one of the persons experienced genealogists tell beginners to consult in initial interviews and surveys of
“home sources: artifacts and documents.” This study deliberately sets heritage album makers in apposition to traditional family historians because they both form layers in how so many others in families and societies come to know the past.

Migration

While so many family historians and album makers in the U.S. are women, it is rare indeed to meet anyone, male or female, looking for family history who is not concerned with migration. The actuality and metaphor of this movement of people building the country is central to all family history discourse and to many other popular American sentiments. Consider how much ancestral memory was evoked in early 2009 when Barack Obama gave his inaugural speech to become the 44th president of the United States:

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh. Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life.

Considering the potency of this national memory, most people begin family history in search of their “crossing ancestors”—that is with those who migrated to the New World. Almost every family has a crossing story of some kind to tell: it’s the story of the way we became Americans. In African-American family history, the crossing is a nightmare of oppression, and for many other families it is a story of hardship and persecution. But it is also a source of pride, because it’s the start of a kind of spiritual pedigree. Crossing stories are rarely written down. They usually exist in

the oral legends that families tell about how they got here, in which truth often yields to a good story and an illustrious forebear.\footnote{Seabrooke, “The Reporter at Large: The Tree of Me,” 60.}

As Vansina found of aboriginal “family histories,” such tales are important especially in recounting recent migrations,\footnote{Vansina, \textit{Oral Tradition}, 156.} in still marking the passage to a new place, and in cementing ties to this new place while acknowledging the old. In world history, European, African, and other continental migrations to North America have been recent and thus continue to work as powerful symbols.

But most ancestors on the North American continent, did they intend to look back? Were they not, as Maxwell found, too busy to look back, or intent on the promised land, the “\textit{framtidslandet}, the land of the future?” This Swedish phrase was found by historian Michael Kammen during a visit to the Museum of American Immigration on Ellis Island in New York. He then asked, “When and how did the United States become a land of the past, a culture with a discernible memory (or with a configuration of recognized pasts)?”\footnote{Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, 7.} Later, he answers this question by seeing in American memory practices, among many other needs, simultaneous desires to resist change and achieve innovations, to define a huge national group and retain ethnic and personal identities.\footnote{Ibid., 10, 701–703.} These conflicting impulses are another layer governing thoughts on migrations, and ultimately family history.
Social Practices in All These Layers

Of these influences, all could be considered aspects of communication processes, much as Nesmith noted for record formation,146 but they are also aspects of imitation embedded in, and spreading through,147 the community of records. Modes of transmission, recontextualization, and pluralization form part of the setting of family history, and form, in terms of records, archivalization and later processes of using records. “Setting” returns us to Maxwell, his choice of locale as a framing mechanism for uncovering obscured family history. For him, finding records required shifting stories and objects (memory texts) to clear some vision of a nation of immigrants who moved quickly across a vast geographical area. Unlike the migration stories of clans studied by Vansina,148 the tellers of American accounts do not thank royalty for survival. As Obama did in his speech, they thank their ancestors themselves, and the god that brought their ancestors to North America. Family history in the U.S. connects people to this type of past, and to one another149 rather than (usually today) to some royal branch. At the same time, there are benefits from the inscribed past, benefits beyond this initial one: American genealogy also ties practitioners to a lost past in other countries and thus joins them to the larger world; it enables a personal understanding of issues of race, class, family, or religion in an increasingly diverse society; and it offers a means of coping with geographical, cultural, or social mobility.150 This is quite a lot to offer and it conforms to what Americans expect of themselves and their nation.

148 Vansina, Oral Tradition, 156.
Social processes complicate these expectations. Genealogy in its most basic form concerns some sort of social stratification. Historically, as Paul Connerton writes, nobility insisted on the quality of hereditary transmission. To be presented at court it was necessary, in principle, to belong to the ancient nobility. From 1732 it was necessary to prove three hundred years of military nobility without known beginning. Genealogies, which taught the true social position of people, the reason for which they had allied or misallied themselves with this family or that, were highly prized.\(^{151}\)

Americans, as the next chapter will show, sought to undo this necessity of shaping social position around ancestry. The first American citizens rejected concepts of nobility, came to prefer the local over the national, the symbolic legacy over the actual. But even within this new accommodation, old habits of hierarchy remained. Writing on democracy in the new country, French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville found that “One hardly ever meets an American who does not want to claim some connection by birth with the first founders of the colonies, and as for offshoots of great English families, I think America is simply full of them.”\(^{152}\) One could speculate that it was the particular Americans he met, and their desire to connect with him as an observer and as a European, that presented the cause for such assertions. Most studies of family history show a different picture than the one de Tocqueville so colorfully reported.\(^{153}\) “[T]he exercise of freedom corresponded

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151 Connerton, How Societies Remember, 85.
nicely with the human impulse to differentiate oneself from others” and the emigration experiences of Americans made them interested in their place in establishing their own position in the new society by knowing more of their families, however poor and in need of migration just to survive, in an older society.154 The task for Americans was, and to a certain extent remains, how to both remember the past and act within a world where ancestry might count differently than it once did. So Americans interested in family history at once emulated and disentangled themselves from the types of thinking Connerton exposed.155

While “equalitarian values” made Americans more interested in “present achievements and future prospects” than in looking to the past, they nevertheless chose to remember some parts of the past. Symbols of one’s family, we will see in the next chapter, would be set within Old World traditions and new ones—layered again. Their combination became integral to identity, but there was need for physical representation of some sort. Why? As Connerton answers:

My lineage, my branch, my name, my coat of arms: all these terms, while insistently referring to the qualities inherent in the possessor, express those qualities in an idealized form; they allude in a somewhat etherealised manner to something that is distinctly and directly corporeal: blood…. But if blood proves membership of an ancient group, that membership must also be visibly displayed.156

Signs, though, also could be substituted, one for another. This part of genealogy, its focus being the choice of a particular ethnic group, one ancestor or one place over another, offers another starting point for understanding the lure of the genealogical record. Genealogy, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich writes, is about “creating.” Discussing the

material inheritance of women in colonial America and the early United States, she states, “Genealogists are not in the business of tracing lineages so much as creating them.” She does not mean here any slight concerned with proof or evidence but rather she looks at intentionality and the habits of the cultures in which genealogists live.\textsuperscript{157}

In a similar vein, historian Donald Harmon Akenson considers genealogy as “an extended form of narrative” with a “plot-structure” and a “grammar of genealogy.” A “kernel genealogical narrative” can be illustrated by a tombstone showing the names, dates of death, and ages at deaths of two people (a man and his wife, in this order since the wife’s maiden name is not given: “John Teskey” and “Anne, Beloved Wife”). But, looking closer, the “kernel narrative” is actually even more concise than these two names, and more universal than the words carved on a gravestone: All that is needed for the genealogical story to begin is that a woman gives birth to a child who lives. As Akenson writes, the fact that many genealogies begin with a male and sometimes even leave out his female partner reveals that genealogies can be seen as being “dictated by cultural desires rather than by biological reality.”\textsuperscript{158}

Ulrich concurs, weaving her argument around her status as a historian and a Mormon herself (and thus “called” to know her ancestors). As both, she ponders over her younger self at a family reunion, where her parents instructed her to introduce herself as “daughter of Kenneth who is the son of Nathan who was the son of Hezekiah.” Only later would she acknowledge the fact that she was also the daughter of generations of women. “[P]atrilineal families survive because women [women’s names] drop out in each

\textsuperscript{157} Connerton, How Societies Remember, 86.
Ulrich broadens her own kernel narrative and those of other women by finding within the layers of the past ways that women preserve the lines of mothers. Since their names are those of their fathers and husbands, she looks for circumstances in which women keep other records and artifacts that are passed between generations.

Ulrich further posits that each generation shifts the evolving practice of family history. As John Gillis also notes, “Families create and live by their own imaginaries.” The home is the “palace of memory,” the site where so many virtual families are constructed both in paper genealogies and in dreams. The palace now has these appendages (notably the Internet, social networking, digital photography) that reach out without leaving home, that house and disseminate records from a family’s personal archives—an archives now because they become public via these technologies of sharing records. This evolution fits well with an American discourse of change, equality, and various temporal orientations of the self to find one’s identity.

The “cultural imaginary” bolsters present goals and rituals. One of these rituals is the family reunion, which 34% of adults in the U.S. attend each year. To capture reunion dollars, hotels now offer special packages, and states vie to be chosen as reunion sites. Nostalgia tourism in Atlanta alone accounts for twenty million dollars income each year. There are also “planning websites,” such as Temple University’s Family Reunion Institute and the African-American Genealogists’ Family Reunion Primer, which

160 Ibid., 6–10.
161 Ibid., 6–10.
encourage research and social networking.\textsuperscript{164} These reunions are considered within two different contexts, one of migration shared by almost all Americans; and the other, from the African-American tradition of “giving back” among extended families dispersed by economic necessity.\textsuperscript{165} Here then too is that other layer within family history, a similar “giving back,” that Yakel and Torres found in the communities of genealogists.\textsuperscript{166} It is possible then to see in African-American genealogy, from \textit{Roots’} 1976 date onward, a model for all populist family history that includes a philosophy of altruism and inclusion, again of democracy desired among Americans in general.

In this type of family history, psychological benefits are promoted. The narratives of the past, told in formal genealogies, scrapbooks, or around the dinner table, are set forth as part of healthy self-development. Here communication is again attentive not only to narratives of migration but also to strength, individualism, and cooperation with others,\textsuperscript{167} in short again to fortitude and sacrifice.

As sociologist Michael Erben confirmed, “In searching for and finding ancestors one is discovering both communality and individuality.”\textsuperscript{168} This discovery “necessarily” returns again to boundaries of inclusion, exclusion, and desires: “Who is part of a family


\textsuperscript{166} Yakel and Torres, “Genealogists as a ‘Community of Records,’” 98.


and who is not? Whose version of the family tree prevails?“**Genealogical worthiness**” is dependent on various systems measuring social distance and constituting social memory. In the next chapters, the layers of these variously defined memories, meanings, and practices frame the history given, the methods chosen, and the voices heard. The concept of layers is meant to provide a focus on looking to obvious and hidden influences, just as family historians and album makers are told to do.
