



Decolonial ARCHIVAL FUTURES

KRISTA MCCRACKEN AND SKYLEE-STORM HOGAN-STACEY

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Series Introduction

“WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE”: IN *THE TEMPEST*, SHAKESPEARE REMINDS us that our actions up to this very moment provide context for our present decisions and actions. The accrual of this activity, in the form of the archival record, enables us to reflect on that past with tangible evidence in hand (or on screen). But recorded evidence doesn’t just enable us to interrogate the present. We preserve the records and data of the present to provide evidence and context that will help us shape our collective future.

The Archival Futures series seeks to capture an irony that lies at the heart of the series title: Can what is past have a future, and vice versa? As a point of departure for critical thinking and for conversation, it centers the active role of archivists *and* everyday people in documenting society. Above all, it seeks to bring together all individuals who have a vested interest in cultural heritage and its stewardship, to both acknowledge and imagine the importance of the future archival record. This is a tall order.

When people find themselves without records and archives, memory, accountability, and transparency become precarious. We all share a collective, vested interest in the future of archives and must be partners in the preservation of the evidence of our present. Archivists act on behalf of the public good. Our work is focused outward and reflects the interests of many individuals and institutions. When archivists appraise records for enduring archival value, we imagine how people will use those materials; when archivists arrange and describe those records, we imagine how those descriptions might help people access important records; when archivists select technology and systems to serve as interfaces to our inventories and digital materials, we consider the ease

with which people can find critical information; when archivists preserve and provide access to records, we imagine how those records will provide context for complex issues to society in the future; and when archivists consider the constellation of digital content on the Web—social media, hosted systems, local systems—and the fragility and ephemeral nature of that content, we understand our vital roles as stewards for the historical record and our role in ensuring that these materials will exist in the future.

What makes this engagement of the archival record possible is a new approach to looking at the archival endeavor. By considering the work of archivists along with the theory that underpins that work, and by pairing that with ideas from contemporary trends in social theory, this series shows how the preservation and stewardship of the archival record is a collective effort that underpins and supports inclusive and democratic societies and institutions. Our current times stand as a watershed for transparency, authenticity, accountability, and representation. These values are bound to the responsible preservation of our historical materials, and everyone should be concerned with the processes by which we accomplish this.

The decision to preserve a historical record is also undertaken in conjunction with allied professionals, such as librarians, museum curators, and information scientists, and is fundamentally future oriented. As the contributions to this series reveal, the notion of an *archival future* underlies all discussions concerning the responsibility to promote the preservation of records that document the full range of human activity. Archival practice necessarily responds to the past, the present, and the future. Archival professionals imagine a future—whether in the next century or a week from now—and strive to support the use of records in that future, by people not yet known, for reasons not yet imagined.

Through the contributions to this series, we want to open the discussion about the future of the archival record. We enter into this with the understanding that the archival record of the past informs contemporary society and that archival practice is a collaborative endeavor—between archivists, librarians, and people. Our stake in the future is written in the records and archives that represent us and tell our stories to future generations. What is past is not simply prologue; what is present is not simply epilogue; the records of the now are vital to the future of human society.

Amy Cooper Cary
Bethany Anderson

Foreword

“[WE] HAVE WORK TO DO”—WORK TO DECOLONIZE ARCHIVES AND build better community relationships. With their deep engagement in grass-roots, Indigenous community archives, Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey know a thing or two about decolonial work and the liberative promise that this work holds for the future of archives—our collective future. And we—“archivists, the archives profession, and archival organizations”—must listen.¹ They are right when they say that “[we] have work to do,” and they show us the tools and ideas that we can use to accomplish the work of decolonization.

Decolonial Archival Futures outlines the contexts of, and paths toward, decolonization. We must respond with enthusiasm and action. The book traces colonial legacies of archives in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—countries that share related histories of settler colonialism. A notable contribution of this book is its comparative examination of the progress and challenges of these countries in the development and adoption of their respective protocols for stewarding Indigenous archival collections and building reciprocal relationships between institutions and source communities. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey pay close attention to implications of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in reshaping archival work, eschewing Western knowledge systems, and embracing Indigenous knowledge and values. They have established this comparative backdrop to argue for the necessity of expanding archival notions of provenance, original order, and, by extension, custody and ownership. More profoundly, their emphasis on the involvement of Indigenous communities in all aspects of archival work,

including participatory and reparative description, is a key step in Indigenizing archives and realizing a decolonial future.

I have a complicated and ambivalent relationship with archival ideas, having received my formative archival education in a former Spanish and American colony from a curriculum imported from US and European traditions. I began my career questioning the colonial foundations of archival thinking and the practices that those records encourage, but, at the same time, I believed in the power of archives and archivists to transform people's lives, histories, and imaginations. Over the years, I have seen the skepticism in embracing the message of community archives, the dismissive attitudes around reparative description, the outright belittling of community-based scholarship, and the objections to the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (PNAAM). A common thread in all of these is that they all challenge professional canons of authority, control, and archival norms. As this book argues, we must learn how to confront our own discomfort in challenging colonial archival ideas. This is part and parcel of contemporary archival work that we all, not just a select some, must do to achieve a decolonial future.

Indeed, “[we] have work to do” when it comes to facilitating community engagement and establishing reciprocal relationships. I write this foreword after recently cofacilitating a visit of Filipino Indigenous artists to three repositories at the University of Michigan (U–M)—the Bentley Historical Library, the Special Collections Research Center, and the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology—as well as to the Newberry Library and the Field Museum in Chicago. The presence of Indigenous archives and material culture from the Philippines, as a former American colony, in the United States demonstrates and further complicates the issues discussed in this book considering the US histories of slavery, settler colonialism, and imperial expansions. For more than a century, archives and material culture that can be essential in sustaining cultural practices, languages, and relations have been far removed from the communities of the United States' former colony in the Pacific that need them most.

Bringing Indigenous culture bearers from the Cordillera region of the Northern Philippines—a basket weaver, a tattoo artist, and a textile master weaver—to examine and retrace the traditional artistic expressions of their ancestors showed U–M archivists and academics the power of direct community access and engagement. But even more, they showed the limitations of archival representation. As experts on their own history and culture, these visiting artists corrected many instances of misspellings, misattributions, and mislabels, thus underscoring McCracken and Hogan-Stacey's point about the crucial role of community experts in reshaping archival work, particularly in

the area of archival description. U–M’s archives, libraries, and museums could update our finding aids, but in some cases, we were not prepared to navigate the visitors’ emotions of such encounters despite numerous articles on archival trauma and re-traumatization in the reading room. Community collaboration and willingness to change harmful practices are particularly potent for the future work with Philippine archives that U–M hopes to do, namely building reciprocal stewardship relationships between Indigenous Filipinos, archivists, and archival repositories.

When there is harm, there is pain. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey are right when they say, “[we] have work to do” that will require “active engagement, difficult conversations, meaningful partnerships, and change.”² Encountering traditional aesthetics, patterns, and designs in photographs and manuscripts produced in the context of colonial administration and scholarship, which have been carefully preserved in US archives but inaccessible to communities they document, brought up complex emotions with our Filipino visiting artists. On one hand, these materials were gathered or produced at the height of colonial rule, and they indeed reflect the period when they were used to justify colonialism and racist policies, but they are also sources for examining cultural/historical knowledge of many communities in the present.

In my pursuit of community-based research that facilitates access and use of archives, I have seen firsthand the discomfort and pain of relying on colonial records to retrace or sustain traditional knowledge. Indigenous cultural expressions and lifeways have been a frequent target of (unsuccessful) colonial annihilation. We have so much work to do to support, honor, and celebrate the survivance³ of Indigenous communities, despite continuing legacies of unspeakable colonial violence. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey begin to explore the many layers of work that will be required. An unknown, and often unacknowledged, record of Indigenous Peoples’ cultural memory is kept in archival repositories, stewarded in some cases by archivists who lack sufficient cultural knowledge about them or the resources to ethically represent that knowledge. There are times when we must acknowledge that despite (and often, because of) our best intentions and allegiance to professional standards, we fail and (un)wittingly replicate harm to communities. After reading this book, it will be more difficult for anyone to take a neutral stance or adhere to principles and practices that our scholarship has proven to be, at best, out of touch with our changing cultural, social, and technical landscapes.

I believe in the message of *Decolonial Archival Futures*. Archives are as much about the past as about their significance in the present. We must act now so we have some hope of creating the decolonial archival futures that we want. Where there is harm, we must work diligently toward repair. When community

perspectives are ignored, we must adopt more inclusive description and policies. When community access is systemically denied, archivists must question these policies and, when possible and appropriate, cede control. And because archival thinking and policy are colonial, we must work toward transformation and Indigenization. This book underscores the first steps to repair the many decades of lack of community control over archives and to build the relationships that are a necessary foundation for a reciprocal model of stewardship. We have work to do.

Ricardo L. Punzalan
University of Michigan School of Information

NOTES

1. Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey, *Decolonial Archival Futures* (Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman and Society of American Archivists, 2023), 61.
2. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey, *Decolonial Archival Futures*, 61.
3. See Gerald Robert Vizenor's *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), and *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

Preface

MUCH OF THIS BOOK DRAWS ON OUR DIRECT EXPERIENCE WORKING in Indigenous community archives and with Indigenous communities. We believe it is essential to clearly articulate our positionality in relation to the Indigenous communities we are writing about.

I (Krista McCracken) am a settler who lives on Robinson-Huron Treaty territory in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada. Since 2010, I have worked at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC), a grassroots community archives dedicated to preserving residential schools' legacy. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities I've had to work alongside residential school Survivors and Indigenous communities, and I continue to learn by listening to Elders and Survivors. When I started working at the SRSC in 2010, I thought I knew about archiving and how archives were supposed to work. But I wasn't prepared to work in a community archives. Canadian archival standards hadn't prepared me for working with community, prioritizing community needs over archival standards. Survivors and Elders showed me a lot of kindness in my early days at the SRSC, where they gently but firmly told me that what I had learned in school was wrong. Their words continue to guide me as I learn to be a more supportive archivist and work to serve community the best I can.

I (Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey) am an urban Indigenous person, descended from the Mohawk Nation of Kahnawà:ke paternally and from settlers maternally. I have spent most of my life between the Greater Tkaronto (Toronto) Area, Tiohti:áke (Montreal), and Baawaating (Sault Ste. Marie). Throughout my career, I have held various positions with the SRSC, and this experience

continues to shape my current scholarship, research, and work, which involves advising and writing public history projects. I completed my master of arts degree in history, specializing in public history, with the University of Western Ontario's Public History program in 2019. My focus with that program was building the skills necessary to understand and reconceptualize public history practice through a decolonial lens. After my degree, I found work as a historian with a historical services and research firm based in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. My projects use archival collections for Indigenous historical and cultural research. As an Indigenous historian and researcher, I often reflect on privilege, access, and control of information. I also reflect on how archives work can leave archivists and historical researchers with vicarious trauma from the ways records are organized and described, as well as their contents. I have branched out from these experiences into policy analysis on behalf of federal government projects dedicated to reshaping archival systems and access for records associated with residential schools in Canada.

We share this information to situate ourselves, our perspectives, and our relationship to archival practice. How we work with communities and our own experiences working in archives and public history inform much of this book. The impetus for the book came from ongoing collaboration and conversations between us. Since our initial time working together in the SRSC, we have spent countless hours discussing the nature of archives and the relationship of Indigenous communities to archival practice. This book represents a continuation of this conversation to provide insight into the colonial roots of archives. It also examines Indigenous community archives and concepts of Indigenous community knowledge that actively resist colonial recordkeeping practices internationally. This book highlights the benefits and challenges of shifting archival narratives away from colonial recordkeeping practices, and it recenters community voices with practical examples. We aim to rethink the archival approach from a decolonized lens and challenge settler readers to critically examine archival power, including relationships with Indigenous knowledge keepers, Indigenous communities, and records documenting Indigenous peoples' lives.¹ When we identify members of the settler community, we want to clarify that this does not include descendants of enslaved persons brought to colonial states against their wishes or under false pretenses. Further, this does not include those who have immigrated to colonial states as refugees or out of necessity to preserve their lives or the lives of their families. We do not include those who have not benefited from the settler-colonial system of white supremacy and are a part of a growing diaspora marginalized by the settler-colonial state.

Settler colonialism is a particular type of colonialism that emphasizes a “logic of elimination and a structure of invasion.”² Settler colonialism enacts itself through recordkeeping practices that erase and minimize Indigenous peoples’ voices, experiences, and agency. By examining archival practices that actively counter settler colonialism, this book challenges non-Indigenous practitioners to consider constructs of knowledge, which histories we tell, and how we present the past. Further, the authors acknowledge that *decolonization* and *reconciliation* are both terms that have garnered substantial discussion within historical and archival scholarship. The work of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang points to the complexity of decolonization and the need to articulate clearly what we mean when we use this term. The overuse of the term *decolonization* has impacted its meaning—the term is often attached to preexisting frameworks of social justice rather than its connection to Indigenous realities amid settler colonialism.³ For the purposes of this book, decolonization is understood to mean accountability to Indigenous peoples. It is directly connected to Indigenous sovereignty and knowledges. Being accountable to Indigenous peoples means working with and alongside Indigenous communities to manage, understand, and work with archival records connected to, by, or about Indigenous peoples. Accountability to Indigenous peoples also involves a willingness to respect and act on Indigenous feedback, engage meaningfully in difficult conversations, and have a commitment to dismantling colonial power dynamics. Every community holds different perspectives based on their experiences, so it is key for decolonial archival practice to build relationships in a good way with the communities most impacted by the collections.

Decolonization should be viewed as approaching systems with Indigenous knowledge frameworks, considering and positioning Indigenous communities as leaders within those frameworks. This understanding of decolonization is important to us, the authors, as most colonial structures cannot be decolonized. With this in mind, decolonization offers a way to focus on the Indigenization of systems and moves beyond existing structures of colonialism. Decolonial archival practice within Indigenous knowledge frameworks directly ties itself to land, knowledge, sovereignty, and Indigenous leadership. The act of thinking about and consciously changing how historical knowledge is produced, communicated, and preserved is the work of decolonial archival and historical practice. This is discussed and expanded on throughout this book with particular emphasis on following Indigenous knowledge frameworks.

We have chosen to focus our writing on unsettling Western archival paradigms from the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. These four countries were selected because of their similar colonial pasts and the nature of

recordkeeping in each country. The countries are all directly tied to the legacy of British colonialism and are all English speaking. Additionally, the selected countries were the only four to initially oppose the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The authors use UNDRIP throughout the book as a benchmark for archival engagement with Indigenous peoples but understand that not all Indigenous scholars see UNDRIP as a solution. These four countries have undertaken similar attempts at developing guidelines for archival care of Indigenous materials. However, these guidelines have been implemented on an ad hoc basis, and each country still has a significant amount of work to do to develop reciprocal archival relationships with Indigenous communities. Within the context of Canada and the United States, archival power is critical in the ongoing investigation of the mass graves attributed to the residential or boarding school system. The authors wish to acknowledge that phrasing the graves attributed to residential schools as a “recent discovery” discounts the oral histories and testimonies of Survivors and their families about the deaths of relatives and classmates from neglect and cruelty at these schools. In Canada, the government, in partnership with different religious denominations, administered residential schools as part of assimilationist policies.⁴ In the United States, the church and government operated boarding schools through similar partnerships, but there is less information on which Christian denominations ran schools.⁵ Archives have an essential role in supporting communities to locate missing children and the parties responsible.

As authors, we recognize that the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are not the only countries with a history of colonialism, nor are they the only countries where archival communities need to reexamine their relationship with Indigenous communities. Instead, this book offers a starting point for discussing decolonial archival practices on a global scale. We need flexible, clear guidelines on how to approach decolonial archival practice, and we need this practice to be taught in postsecondary settings and workplaces. We are not there yet. There remain tremendous gaps in educational settings in teaching about Indigenous archival practices and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Divided into five chapters, *Decolonial Archival Futures* moves from reflecting on colonial recordkeeping practices to imagining Indigenous archival futures. The opening chapter discusses the colonial roots of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It positions the legacy of colonialism in connection to recordkeeping and archival practice in each respective chapter. Chapter two is framed within the principles of self-determination and ownership and examines how UNDRIP relates to archival practice. This chapter also highlights the cultural stewardship protocols developed by each of the four countries,

reflecting on the successes and challenges of these protocols. Chapters three and four are rooted in case study examples of Indigenous community archival practice. Chapter three looks at the principle of archival provenance and how original order and provenance can be reframed or reworked to meet the needs of Indigenous communities. Chapter four discusses participatory archival description and the integration of Indigenous communities in archival description practices. The book concludes with a forward-facing chapter in which the authors reimagine a future where archival practice, research, and community engagement exist within a decolonized, Indigenous-led framework.

Krista McCracken
Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey

NOTES

1. The term *settler* refers to non-Indigenous peoples who have, or whose ancestors have, settled in a land that Indigenous peoples have traditionally inhabited. Settlers have historically and continue to assert sovereignty over Indigenous land. For more information, see Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Co. Ltd., 2015).
2. See Patrick Wolfe's "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (2006): 387–409.
3. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
4. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Volume 1 (McGill-Queens University Press, 2015): 9–10.
5. Peter Smith, "US Report Details Church-State Collusion on Native Schools," Associated Press, May 14, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/canada-religion-education-native-americans-cultures-87a09745351c02236b99e2955785e1f7>, captured at <https://perma.cc/K8AM-38B3>.

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