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Lisa E. Duncan

*University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, led1@email.arizona.edu*

Trent Purdy

*trentp@email.arizona.edu*

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# Poets, Pioneers, Sci Fi Authors and Arctic Explorers: Deaccessioning Audiovisual Materials in the Archives

Lisa E. Duncan  
Trent Purdy

## ABSTRACT

In 2017 the University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections (UALSC) conducted a survey of audiovisual materials in its collections. The Multimedia Archivist collected data on the content, quantity, format and condition of these materials. Deaccessioning collections was not a practice UALSC had routinely implemented in the past. However with the additional information collected during this survey obvious candidates for deaccessioning arose. The Multimedia Archivist was concerned about the long term preservation of these collections so it was imperative that UALSC take action. The backlog for the reformatting of audiovisual materials was large and the budget limited. The collections identified for deaccessioning were a low priority for preservation and returning these collections to their institutions increased their chances of timely attention.

The determination to deaccession these audiovisual materials was based on three criteria: content, copyright ownership and condition. Collections that fell outside our collection development scope were prime candidates. A few collections that did fall within our scope contained audiovisual materials whose copyright ownership was clearly held by other institutions. Finally, collections that contained formats that UALSC had limited ability to adequately preserve were also considered. Ultimately five collections that met these criteria were selected for deaccessioning. UALSC had not developed formal deaccessioning processes so in order to proceed policies and practices for deaccessioning were developed by the department.

The five collections included materials that were also held at the University of Arizona Poetry Center, the University of New Mexico, the Arizona Historical Society and the Pacifica Network. To the UA Poetry Center UALSC returned deposited copies of the UA Poetry Reading Series that were now held in the UA Poetry Center's archive and readily available on the UA Poetry Center's streaming site. Another collection contained copies of oral histories that were dubbed from master copies held at the University of New Mexico. Third, UALSC acquired a fanzine collection of a science fiction writer which included copies of a radio show he hosted on the Pacifica Network who holds the copyright for this program. Fourth, in the mid-1970s, the Arizona Historical Society funded an oral history project to document the history of Arizona. Copies of many of these interviews were found in UALSC's Oral History collection. The Arizona Historical Society retains the master tapes and copyright for these materials. Finally, UALSC holds a small collection of a famous Arctic explorer which includes a 16 mm film of his voyages. The condition of this film is of particular concern as it was in an advanced state of deterioration. Another repository holds a large collection of his films and their return would reunite a split collection.

The archivists began a discussion with these institutions about the possible return of materials. Ultimately, deaccessioning these materials returns them to their rightful institutions and highlights the time sensitive nature for preservation of many audiovisual formats. It allows the Multimedia Archivist to focus on the unique audiovisual materials prioritized for preservation and migration within UALSC and it strengthens relationships with repositories within the state and forms new relationships with other repositories.

## Introduction

The University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections (further referenced as Special Collections) was established in 1958 and since that time, has collected unique primary and secondary sources that document the history of Southern Arizona and its culture. Over the ensuing decades, the institution has amassed a sizeable collection of audiovisual assets on various legacy analog formats. It was not until the Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist position was established, 58 years later, that an FTE position in Special Collections would be dedicated to the responsible stewardship of legacy analog audiovisual assets.

In 2017, Special Collections conducted a survey of audiovisual materials in its collections. The survey of audiovisual holdings, the first of its kind at Special Collections, established priorities for digitization for both preservation and enhanced access and permitted us to make informed reappraisal decisions on holdings both in our processed collections and materials held within the accession backlog. The Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist collected data on the content, uniqueness, quantity, format and condition of these materials. With the additional information collected during this survey, obvious candidates for deaccessioning arose. The Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist was concerned about the long-term preservation of these collections, so it was imperative that Special Collections take action. The audiovisual materials backlog for reformatting was large and the budget limited. Deaccessioning collections was not a practice Special Collections had routinely implemented in the past but with the new information from the survey, it was imperative to discuss the crafting of a policy that addressed collections that were a low priority for preservation and out of collection scope for Special Collections. Reuniting collections or transferring them to more appropriate repositories increased their chances of timely attention.

The determination to deaccession these audiovisual materials was based on four criteria: content, scope, copyright ownership, and condition. Collections that fell outside our collection development scope were prime candidates. A few collections that did fall within our scope contained audiovisual materials whose copyright ownership was clearly held by other institutions. Finally, collections that contained formats that Special Collections had limited ability to adequately preserve were also considered. Special Collections had not developed formal deaccessioning processes so to proceed, policies and practices for deaccessioning were developed by the department. Ultimately, deaccessioning allowed these materials to be returned to

their rightful institutions and highlighted the time sensitive nature for preservation of many audiovisual formats. It permitted the Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist to focus on the unique audiovisual materials prioritized for preservation and migration within Special Collections. Finally, it further strengthened relationships with repositories within the state and formed new relationships with other repositories.

## Literature Review

In May 2017, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) released the final version of their *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*. SAA “recognized a need for minimal, voluntary professional standards for the widespread practices of reappraisal and deaccessioning.”<sup>1</sup> These guidelines “formally establish reappraisal and deaccessioning as responsible options for repositories to better manage their collections.”<sup>2</sup> Reappraisal and deaccessioning have long been controversial topics in the archival profession with little literature to provide guidance on these practices. Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg are often mentioned when discussing reappraisal, though neither addressed the actual reappraisal of records already a part of a repository’s holdings. Jenkinson argued that those who produced the records were most qualified to select materials for destruction and archivists’ personal judgement should be kept out of it.<sup>3</sup> Schellenberg thought archivists should “have final responsibility for judging the secondary values of records.”<sup>4</sup> Neither discussed deaccessioning or destroying records after they arrived at the archives.

Although there is an abundance of literature related to appraisal and appraisal theory, it was not until the last 30 years that deaccessioning was addressed. The most recognized figure cited as beginning the debate on this topic was Leonard Rapport whose 1981 article “No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records” questioned archivists’ view of accessioned records as being permanent, calling for archivists to “make a case for continuing to retain records rather than for getting rid of them.”<sup>5</sup> He asks us to reassess the records that have been on our shelves and if they would be accepted today. He saw reappraisal as something that should be conducted

1. Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Development and Review Team, “Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning,” Society of American Archivists, revised May 2017, 6, [https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForReappraisalDeaccessioning\\_2017.pdf](https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForReappraisalDeaccessioning_2017.pdf) (accessed March 14, 2019).
2. Ibid.
3. Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, 2nd edition (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1965).
4. T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 30.
5. Leonard Rapport, “No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records,” *American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (1981): 145.

“systematically and periodically.”<sup>6</sup> In response to Rapport’s article, Karen Benedict in “Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives—A Reply to Leonard Rapport” gives a rebuttal to Rapport’s arguments. She criticizes the ideas of reevaluating the judgement of previous archivists and of the danger “to suggest that, to conserve space, the staff should search the holdings for records that can be discarded,” and that current use doesn’t predict their future use.<sup>7</sup> However, since the publication of Rapport’s article, the literature has overwhelmingly been in favor of deaccessioning as a legitimate and necessary collection management tool.

There have been numerous case studies that detail the use of deaccessioning as a collection management tool. SAA’s *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning’s* accompanying Annotated Bibliography—Literature Review includes an extensive annotated bibliography of the current literature.<sup>8</sup> Other guidelines have emerged in the literature such as Frank Boles’ *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* and Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt’s *Navigating Legal Issues in Archives*; both include brief chapters on deaccessioning with general guidelines.

While much of the literature advocates for a systematic and holdings-wide approach to deaccessioning, the SAA guidelines state that they can be applied to individual collections or portions of collections and are format neutral. Most of the literature discusses whole-scale deaccessioning programs that evaluate the entire holdings of a repository for possible deaccession. Few look at the possibility of deaccessioning based on the format or content type. Mark Greene advocates for a holdings-wide reappraisal and deaccessioning because “piecemeal deaccession greatly increases the risk that dramatically different decisions will be made from one collection or series to another.”<sup>9</sup> However, by looking at whole collections, both artificial and more traditionally acquired collections based on their format, we have been able to return at-risk formats to institutions that can adequately address their needs, reunite split collections, and focus on Special Collections’ highest priorities for preservation and digitization.

Sam Kula examines appraisal as it applies to audiovisual sources, noting that scant appraisal theory has been written for these materials. Using Schellenburg’s appraisal theory as a basis, Kula writes “archival literature offers little in the way of

6. Ibid.

7. Karen Benedict, “Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives—A Reply to Leonard Rapport,” *American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984): 45.

8. Society of American Archivists, “Annotated Bibliography—Literature Review,” <https://www.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Annotated%20BibliographyFinal.pdf> (accessed February 2019).

9. Mark Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser,” *American Archivist* 30, no. 1 (2006): 13.

concrete and practical guidance.”<sup>10</sup> Kula’s development of an appraisal theory specific to audiovisual sources uses moving image sources as its focus. The author notes that appraising the archival value of moving image materials is problematic given the ambiguity of their functional or evidentiary value. This ambiguity invariably results in appraisal conducted at the item level by curators due to the costs involved in processing, which for the majority of audiovisual collections is also done at the item level. This is a departure from appraisal of paper-based collections, which is often done at the series or record group level. Kula observes that the archival profession on the whole has been slow to develop practical appraisal theories in relation to moving image materials, and by extension all audiovisual sources. The costs of processing, conservation, and storage of moving image sources can easily be 100 times the costs of conserving a cubic foot of paper records over a 10-year period. These numbers are sobering to curators of audiovisual materials and pose formidable practical barriers to the retention of moving image materials.

Karen Gracy expands upon themes of archival appraisal of audiovisual materials posited by Kula. Likewise, using moving image materials as an example, the author argues against archivists adapting the wholesale application of appraisal theory to moving image materials. The author states that most appraisal models developed are not designed with moving image materials in mind. Because of this, moving image archivists are left questioning the validity of appraisal models for moving image materials as these particular materials do not always meet the traditional definition of a record as the archives profession defines it. This existential problem of defining the “recordness” of moving image materials is caused by the lack of contextual guidelines by which to make appraisal decisions, as repositories often do not collect records that document the production process. This results in a lack of evidential value for the materials. Appraisal is further muddled by the multiple perceived values of moving image materials, which potentially have varied evidential and informational value to disparate research communities. Appraisal of moving image materials has mostly been driven by preservation, not selection. As a result, most archives collect moving image materials with abandon, resulting in audiovisual sources being in direct competition with paper-based collections for processing priorities. Moving image materials usually lose out to paper-based collections given the resource commitment involved in processing and preserving moving image materials. This results in important primary source materials languishing in backlogs inaccessible to researchers.<sup>11</sup>

Building upon appraisal theory as it applies to moving image materials posited by Kula and Gracy, Anthony Cocciolo moves to establish appraisal theory for audiovisual assets as a whole. The author writes that there is a real need not only for appraisal, but an expanded conceptualization of appraisal, one that accommodates the unusual

10. Sam Kula, *Appraising Moving Images* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 23-24, 34.

11. Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 80-81.

demands (housing, storage conditions, processing) that audiovisual materials present on resources. Echoing the urgings of Kula, Cocciolo encourages stewards of audiovisual materials to also consider the costs of digital preservation as a driving factor behind appraisal as digital master files are large and demand significant investment over time. Technical appraisal of assets should also be a factor during the appraisal process. This takes into consideration the specialized equipment needed to playback the media and the inherent cost of purchasing and maintaining this hardware. Cocciolo writes that archivists will likely encounter media held in processed collections which will lead them to consider reappraisal of these materials and consider the value of using scarce resources to preserve them. This reappraisal process of audiovisual materials is often a time-consuming process, as the item must be listened to or watched to determine its value. However, this investment ultimately yields positive returns, allowing the archivist to determine if the content of AV assets fits into the collecting scope of the repository.<sup>12</sup>

## Case Studies

In March 2016, the University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections hired a Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist. This was a new position dedicated specifically to the curation and stewardship of audiovisual primary source materials. The Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist identified a gap in the intellectual and physical control of audiovisual materials held in Special Collections and set forth conducting a survey of these materials. This survey spanned both processed and unprocessed materials held in the backlog and identified collections that contained audiovisual assets. An Excel spreadsheet captured the location, format quantity and type, subject, and item uniqueness. The subject field was described using Library of Congress Subject Headings derived from the collections' finding aids, when available. Also denoted in this particular field was the collection scope of each collection, using Special Collections' seven collecting areas: University of Arizona, Political Affairs, Science and Technology, Arizona and the Southwest, Borderlands, Performing Arts, and Literature.

Identifying the subjects of audiovisual assets was an essential component to the reappraisal process, and allowed us to make informed decisions about deaccessioning materials that did not conform to our defined collecting scope, were a low priority, or were considered part of a split collection. The majority of the audiovisual materials identified for deaccessioning were straightforward and clearly fell outside Special Collections' traditional collecting scope. They also contained audiovisual materials that required additional care that Special Collections could not provide.

The first collection considered for deaccessioning contained materials that while

12. Anthony Cocciolo, *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2017), 14-18.

in scope, were held at other institutions. In the 1960s, the UA Libraries collected materials related to the Southwest to add to the library's Western Collection, a collection of materials, both secondary and primary sources related to the history of Arizona and the west.<sup>13</sup> Since there were limited ways for materials to be shared quickly and conveniently, the library collected copies of primary source materials from other libraries that might be of interest to researchers in Arizona. Lou Blachly was a longtime federal employee who after retirement renewed his interest in oral history. He founded the Pioneers Foundation in New Mexico in 1951 with private donations to collect the reminiscences of longtime residents and pioneers of the Southwest region, primarily New Mexico. Blachly conducted hundreds of interviews during his time with the Pioneers Foundation in New Mexico. Blachly moved to Tucson in the late 1950s and left the bulk of his materials to the University of Arizona Libraries. His papers included materials related to his family's history, his government service, his nature writings and diaries, and his work with the Pioneers Foundation. The library was interested in adding copies of his oral histories to the Western Collection. With the permission of Blachly before his death and the Pioneers Foundation who owns the copyright for these interviews, the library ordered copies of over 600 oral histories from the University of New Mexico where the collection resides. In 2002, Special Collections migrated the original ¼ inch audio reels to preservation reels and also made access copy compact discs. In total Special Collections possessed three generations of Blachly's audio materials.

Since the libraries had invested significant resources into migrating and maintaining these tapes, we discussed the potential issues we may face if we deaccessioned them. The unprocessed materials were currently inaccessible since they were not listed in the Lou Blachly papers (MS o83) finding aid. Also, the institution that held the original recordings had specific restrictions on access to them. The finding aid states that "duplication of recordings permitted only with written permission from artist, performer, interviewer and interviewee, tribal authority, or current holder of intellectual property rights" with use of transcripts only allowed in the reading room.<sup>14</sup> It did not make sense to keep three sets of copies that we could not make available. After consulting the online finding aids at the University of New Mexico (UNM) Center for Southwest Research for both the Lou Blachly papers and the Pioneers Foundation (New Mexico) Oral History Collection, we were able to locate the majority of the tapes we held.

We contacted the UNM Center for Southwest Research and spoke with an archivist about this collection. We offered to return all of the tapes to UNM, both the

13. Special Collections currently has seven defined collecting areas with Arizona and the Southwest as a continued priority to document the region's culture and history, including accounts of Native Americans, the impact of Spanish and Mexican settlement, and the influx of other groups into the region from the 19th century onwards.
14. Inventory of the Pioneers Foundation (New Mexico) Oral History Collection, 1952-1960, MSS 123 BC, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, <https://rmoa.unm.edu/docviewer.php?docId=nmuimss123bc.xml> (accessed February 2019).



original reels and the copies Special Collections created or if preferred, to destroy our copies. After discussing the state of their holdings for this collection it was determined that UNM already held both preservation and access copies of all the tapes we held. UNM asked us to destroy our copies and we agreed to do so. We added a related archival materials note to Special Collections' finding aid for the Lou Blachly papers (MS 083) to indicate that UNM held additional collections of Blachly materials, including the Pioneers Foundation oral histories which had not been included in the original finding aid. During the investigation of the Oral History collection which will be discussed later, Blachly oral histories were also found. It was determined that these materials were originally part of the Blachly papers and also offered to UNM once they were deaccessioned from the Oral History collection.

In the 1980s, Special Collections purchased a collection of materials related to Anthony Boucher. Boucher was a prominent author, critic and editor who won several Hugo awards for *The Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy* and had award-winning science fiction and crime fiction novels and short stories. The majority of this collection was amateur and semi-professional fanzines. Boucher collected fanzines, self-published, small circulation magazines, from the 1940s to 1960s on a range of topics, primarily science fiction literature but also fandom, fantasy, comics, the horror genre, and other general topics. This collection was processed in 2014 however, during the survey of audiovisual holdings in Special Collections, several boxes of audio reels related to Anthony Boucher were found in the unprocessed collections backlog. It was determined that they were copies of the radio show *Escape! Anthony Boucher* where Boucher reviewed and discussed crime, suspense and mystery novels. These tapes were most likely separated from the fanzines after the purchase of the Boucher materials, and as such were not processed with the rest of his collection.

Since there was no documentation on who broadcast the materials in our records, we started investigating Boucher's life and works. It was determined that his radio show *Escape! Anthony Boucher* was broadcast on KPFA, a station in the San Francisco Bay area which is owned by the Pacifica Network. After determining that the Pacifica Network owned the copyright for this radio show, it increased the constraints put on Special Collections to provide access to these materials. Since Special Collections didn't own the copyright, digitization of these materials for preservation and online access was a lower priority than the materials with no copyright restrictions. The collection consisted of 39 ¼ inch audio reels. We found one episode of this program listed on the Pacifica Radio Archives catalog. We contacted the Pacifica Radio Archives and offered to return the tapes. The Pacifica Radio Archives were happy to add these tapes to their collection since they did not have a complete run of the program. Through these efforts, Special Collections was able to reunite and expand a collection that belonged at the Pacifica Radio Archives.

Robert Bartlett was an arctic explorer from Newfoundland, who captained numerous expeditions to the arctic. The Bob Bartlett collection (MS 116) primarily consists of correspondence between Bartlett and his friend in New York City but it

also includes one 16mm black and white motion picture film. During the audiovisual survey of Special Collections holdings this film was inventoried. Upon inspection, the film showed signs of deterioration including shrinking and curling. Since this film's condition was not ideal, it was marked for further immediate consideration of preservation and digitization. Once the candidates for preservation and digitization were reviewed, this film was placed at the bottom of the list because the content of the film was outside of our scope. It was also added to the list of audiovisual materials to deaccession. We researched collections of Robert Bartlett papers and found a number of collections at different institutions including Mystic Seaport Museum, Dartmouth Library, and Bowdoin College. After reviewing the collections at these institutions, we decided to contact Bowdoin College since they had similar films. After reviewing the rest of the Bartlett papers, we decided to bring the possibility of deaccessioning the entire Bartlett collection to the department. It clearly fell outside our collecting scope and larger collections of similar materials were already housed at other institutions. During one of our collection management meetings, we discussed the audiovisual deaccessioning project and our desire to keep the entire Bartlett collection together and offer the entire collection to Bowdoin College. The archivists and curators agreed with our assessment to deaccession this collection. This would send the film to an institution that could prioritize its care and reunite a collection.

The Oral History collection (MS 490) posed an interesting and challenging case study for the reappraisal of audiovisual materials. It is an artificial collection comprised of a hodgepodge of subjects including oral histories with Arizona and New Mexico settlers and pioneers, readings by renowned poets, commencement speeches, addresses and speeches by past University of Arizona Presidents. While the collection had been assigned a manuscript number and a preliminary finding aid was written, it had never been added to our website or finding aids portal, so it was inaccessible to the public. All materials within the collection were ¼ inch audiotape. Given the age of the format and that this was the preferred format for oral historians and field recorders for collecting content, we believed that it was likely that these were archival masters or at the least, second-generation copies, increasing the likelihood of their uniqueness.<sup>15</sup> Given these circumstances, we determined the materials must be reappraised at the item level. There was no provenance history for this collection in the control file, which made discerning the source of the materials difficult. Processing the collection had resulted in an inventory for the collection, but it too contained no custodial or provenance information. Additionally, past attempts had been made to determine if the materials were held at other institutions, perhaps with the intention to deaccession or return materials to institutions. These efforts were abandoned before completion and the lack of project documentation leads us to only be able to speculate about the intended outcomes of the project. From the names of famous Arizona pioneers and nationally lauded poets listed in the finding aid, we

15. Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History*, 2nd edition (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), introduction, x.

concluded that these materials had enormous historical value. We decided to prioritize the collection for reprocessing to finally allow access to the collection. Rich descriptive abstracts for the Arizona pioneer oral histories and the poetry readings found in the inventory acted as red flags for the possibility that these materials were held at other archival repositories. It seemed unlikely that we would have created abstracts for materials that were never made accessible.

The audiotapes documenting poetry readings were an obvious starting point for reappraisal, as they appeared to pose the fewest obstacles. As mentioned, rich description of the materials along with past efforts at identifying custodianship of materials denoted that the readings were available at the University of Arizona Poetry Center. In total this amounted to 59 audiotapes. A check of the Poetry Center's online Audio Video Library, VOCA, revealed a digital collection featuring audio and video recordings from the Poetry Center's long-running series of poetry readings by internationally known poets such as Edward Abbey and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

We started checking materials listed in our finding aid against VOCA. Of the 59 audiotapes held in the Oral History collection, 48 were available via VOCA. The tapes not accounted for in VOCA had "master" written on the front of the audiotape box. These were set aside for the Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist to listen to in-house. Listening to the audiotapes confirmed that they were readings by poets, with introductions by the then director of the Poetry Center. This is consistent on all the other audiotapes held in the collection owned by the Poetry Center which led us to comfortably assume these materials belonged to the Poetry Center.

Once the materials in the collection were definitively determined to belong to the Poetry Center and with most of them accessible to researchers on a global scale through VOCA, we began the process of deaccessioning the audiotapes from the collection. The first step in the deaccessioning process was to contact the Poetry Center's library to inform them of our audiotape holdings and to confirm that they were access copies that duplicated intellectual content owned and held at their institution. The librarian was very receptive and appreciative of our endeavors to return materials they retained custody over and was surprised that these materials resided at our institution as there was no record of duplication or transfer of the audiotapes in their institutional records.

An inventory of the materials was sent to the Poetry Center librarian who confirmed that the materials duplicated content available through VOCA and audiotapes they held onsite. Titles of several audiotapes were not familiar to them and they asked if we could listen to the items to provide more accurate descriptions of the content. Listening to the audiotapes revealed that they were duplicates of poetry readings by Edward Abbey already held at the Poetry Center. All of the audiotapes from in the Oral History collection that were not listed in VOCA were not held at the Poetry Center. This allowed a split collection held across two institutions to be reunited and created an opportunity for these materials to be made available to

researchers via an online platform for the first time.

Special Collections archivists made arrangements with the Poetry Center to deliver the audiotapes and have deaccession documents signed which were subsequently placed in the Special Collections control files. As an unexpected and added bonus during the visit, the Poetry Center librarian gave the Special Collections archivists a tour of the Poetry Center's library and archives and detailed the institution's mission and collecting scope as well as ongoing efforts to digitize poetry readings held on analog media to add to VOCA.

Once the audiotapes from the Oral History collection containing poetry materials were deaccessioned and returned to the Poetry Center, reappraisal of the remaining audiotapes within the collection commenced. This proved to be a more daunting, involved, and time-consuming task. Special Collections archivists again returned to the collection's finding aid to glean any information about the remaining audiotapes, relying on titles of items and available abstracts to discern content and provenance. Scrutinizing items individually revealed an abundance of oral history spanning a wide range of subjects including histories of Arizona and the Southwest and the University of Arizona. Prominent names of Arizona settlers and University of Arizona Presidents were peppered throughout the finding aid which indicated that these materials might be within the repository's collecting scope.

Given the vagueness of descriptions within the finding aid, we decided the first step towards reappraising the remaining materials was to physically view each individual audiotape and look for commonalities among the materials, such as audiotape manufacturer, handwriting on tape boxes, and/or identifying documents accompanying audiotapes. We hoped this approach might provide clues about the provenance of the audiotapes and allow us to determine the individual oral history projects and separate them into discrete collections. Once this was completed, we started reappraising the collections to determine if they should be deaccessioned or returned to an appropriate institution. This proved to be an astute approach as examination of the physical audiotapes greatly aided us in reconstructing the provenance for two distinct collections created by oral historian Emil F. Schaaf. The methods used to decipher the provenance of these audiotapes, in-depth research, and a healthy dose of coincidence helped us determine the provenance of the remaining oral history projects within the collection.

The Oral History collection consisted of 9 boxes and over 300 individual ¼ inch audiotapes. We quickly realized that reappraising the contents at an item level would be a serious time commitment. However, given the assumed importance of the intellectual content of the materials based on the limited information available in the finding aid, coupled with the likelihood that these materials were unique to Special Collections holdings, we decided the potential return was worth the investment. The first three boxes of the collection held ¼ inch audiotapes on the same stock brand. Each audiotape box had the name of the oral history subject written on the verso in the same handwriting and "Master" written on the front. Several boxes contained a business card that read "Emil F. Schaaf, Historian." This proved to be a very valuable

piece of information. We began searching this name against archival databases including Arizona Archives Online, a finding aid consortium of institutions across Arizona. This search returned zero results, so we searched ArchivesGrid. This too returned zero results. The final search was within the Arizona Historical Society (AHS) catalog. This returned 128 oral histories by Emil F. Schaaf with Arizona pioneers. Interestingly, the materials listed in the AHS catalog were audiocassettes with a date range of 1970-1971. As mentioned, the materials held within the Oral History collection were ¼ inch audiotapes with a date range of 1970-1973. Since the ¼ inch audiotape format preceded audiocassettes and the date range of materials extended beyond those listed in the AHS catalog, we felt strongly that we held the masters of the materials held at AHS. To prove this, we conducted extensive research within our own resources and AHS collections.

Special Collections holds a large collection of vertical files with information about prominent Arizonans, University of Arizona faculty, and researchers. Checking Emil F. Schaaf's surname against the collection's finding aid returned a file which held a photocopy of a newspaper article detailing an oral history project Schaaf was commissioned to create for the Arizona Historical Society as well as his obituary dating from 1973. The former provided invaluable details of the oral history project Schaaf conducted for the Arizona Historical Society. The article states that the project was named *Voices of the Past* and funded by the 1971 Arizona Legislature. The intent of the project was to "retain from the state experienced field interviewers who are familiar with the people and history of the region."<sup>16</sup> The article went on to detail that the first set of interviews for the project were conducted by Schaaf and he had completed 60 oral histories. The latter provided details of Schaaf's life and death and, interestingly, stated his occupation at the time of his death as historian for the University of Arizona.

With this information, we now had a basis for the provenance of the audiotapes we believed were created by Schaaf dated 1970-1971. However, the provenance of audiotapes falling outside that timeframe was still opaque. We decided that listening to the tapes dated 1972-1973 might provide some clues. As mentioned, Schaaf was a trained oral historian and was diligent about adhering to professional best practices of stating the full name of the subject, the oral historian, place and date of the oral history, and the name of the project. Schaaf stated that the materials were being made for the University of Arizona on all of the audiotapes. We now felt confident about the provenance of the audiotapes created by Schaaf, with materials dated 1970-1971 belonging to AHS and those dated 1972-1973 to the UA. However, we still needed more information about the remaining audiotapes before we could make an informed reappraisal assessment. We decided to search an unprocessed collection held at Special Collections that contains administrative records of the UA Libraries, hoping to find documents that might provide any insight into Schaaf's oral history project. We located a small folder within the collection detailing the project proposal, the

16. "Voices of the Past Captured on Tape," *Willcox Range News*, 1971.

funding, scope, and time frame. These documents confirmed that materials dated 1972-1973 were made for the University of Arizona. We intellectually separated the two projects within the existing inventory using a color-coded system.

After identifying audiotapes for the respective Schaaf oral history projects, five boxes of audiotapes remained in the Oral History collection, amounting to 63 items. Provenance and intellectual content of the remaining audiotapes was still unclear. Physically inspecting the audiotapes didn't reveal any useful information as the audiotape boxes contained sparse descriptive information with no associated documentation. Listening to a sampling of the materials also didn't provide any information as neither subjects nor interviewers stated their names or any project information. Speaking with a colleague who has extensive institutional knowledge, we were told of a card catalog in Special Collections which the colleague believed might hold information on the audiotapes. We scoured the entirety of the card catalog and discovered records for each individual audiotape. Each card catalogue record identified the name of the oral history creator and the subject. The majority also detailed dates and descriptive information in brief abstracts. We updated the existing inventory with the metadata from the card catalogue records and color coded the inventory to distinguish the audiotapes by creator. We decided this approach would allow us to disassemble the existing artificial collection's structure and reappraise the materials to determine if they should be retained, deaccessioned, or returned to the appropriate repository.

With the disparate Schaaf oral history projects definitively identified, we contacted archivists at AHS, explaining the nature of our reappraisal project and our desire to return the Schaaf Voices of the Past audiotapes to them. We explained that the AHS online catalog listed some but not all of the oral histories we held, and those listed were identified as being audiocassettes, which lead us to believe that we held the ¼ inch master tapes. AHS archivists were very receptive to our intentions and quickly proceeded with searching their holdings to determine which generation of these recordings were in their custody. Their search revealed that they held a small control file for the collection that details the scope of Schaaf's *Voices of the Past* oral history project and some documentation for funding from the 1971 Arizona Legislature. Unfortunately, the control file did not contain documentation on the donation of the audio materials generated from Schaaf's project. A search returned that AHS also held ¼ inch audiotapes that, like the audiotapes held at Special Collections, are labeled "master" along with the audiocassette access copies discoverable via the AHS online catalog. The "master" designation on both sets of ¼ inch audiotapes caused obvious confusion about which set is indeed the true set of master recordings. To err on the side of caution, AHS archivists decided to accept the audiotapes held at Special Collections and do future in-depth research to discern the provenance of the sets. The audiotapes were delivered to AHS archivists along with an inventory of the audiotapes deaccessioned. Two sets of deaccession documents were signed by both the AHS and Special Collections archivists. This documentation along with the inventory of audiotapes and associated email correspondence was

placed within the Oral History collection control file. In whole, the results of our reappraisal of the Oral History collection determined the collection held ten distinct oral history projects from three collection institutions with over 200 individuals.

The subjects of the audiotapes after the deaccessioning of the UA Poetry Center and Schaaf's *Voices of the Past* materials included Arizona pioneers, outlaws, politicians, and University of Arizona faculty and administrators. Again, we searched Arizona Archives Online, ArchivesGrid, WorldCat, and the Arizona Historical Society's online catalog to determine their uniqueness. The results of the searches were negative; we prioritized the audiotapes to be processed as distinct collections, which is scheduled to be completed by early 2020. In total, the time committed to reappraising and deaccessioning materials held in the Oral History collection was well over 40 hours. However, we believe this will prove to be a good return on investment as it will make hidden collections discoverable to researchers for the first time.

## Conclusion

The National Recording Preservation Plan published in 2012 posits a cautionary warning aimed specifically at archives professionals who steward legacy audiovisual materials. The plan states:

*many analog audio recordings must be digitized within the next 15 to 20 years—before sound carrier degradation and the challenges acquiring and maintaining playback equipment make the success of these efforts too expensive or unattainable.*<sup>17</sup>

Through the establishment, funding, and continued support of the Multimedia and Digital Collections Archivist position in Special Collections, library administration and resource allocators have decided to take a proactive stance on the responsible stewardship of audiovisual materials and is fully invested in the audiovisual digitization program currently being established by this position. This support includes an annual audiovisual digitization budget to support vendor digitization. It also includes funding for the buildout of an audiovisual digitization lab in Special Collections which was completed in April 2018. This lab allows for the digitization of unique magnetic audiovisual assets housed within Special Collections and facilitates greater control over the digitization process including generating rich descriptive and technical metadata for assets for preservation and enhanced researcher access and discoverability.

This deaccession project established a model for the future deaccessioning of both audiovisual and paper-based collections in Special Collections. When we first explored the idea of deaccessioning audiovisual materials we searched through the

17. Nelson-Strauss, Brenda, Alan Gevinson, and Sam Brylawski, *The Library of Congress National Recording Preservation Plan* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2012).

policies, procedures and forms in Special Collections. Special Collections had previously collected information on common deaccessioning practices and created a deaccessioning form. However, there were no formal procedures or collection management policies to follow.

After searching the literature and reading SAA's guidelines, we redesigned the deaccessioning form and created short-term policies to move forward with deaccessioning these materials. We created criteria for deaccessioning materials regardless of format that we could apply to these audiovisual materials. We could now use this experience as a basis for future efforts in deaccessioning. This also created an opportunity for Special Collections to review, revise or create additional collections management policy and procedure. We explored Arizona's requirements for legally deaccessioning state property and any obligation the library may have with informing donors. This deaccessioning project which began as a collections management exercise developed into an opportunity to discuss Special Collections practices and policies.

It also became an opportunity to learn more about and strengthen working relationships with local institutions, as well as provide a framework for returning numerous assets to their rightful institutions. While Tucson archives work well together, it strengthened the relationship Special Collections held with several institutions as we worked together to create the best situation for the materials in our care. It expanded our knowledge of the collecting scope of the local institutions which will aid us as prospective donors decide where to donate their audiovisual materials. It hopefully also allows other institutions to consider materials that might fit better with Special Collections when they are undertaking similar projects.

This project also allowed us to review and refine our collection development scope to bring in appropriate collections, especially in regard to audiovisual materials. It brought to our attention the need to write specifically about the formats of audiovisual materials we will accept and the types of content most important to preserve. This will help Special Collections prioritize the materials we already steward but also shape the kinds of collections we will accept in the future.

Although the project was an overall success, there were still challenges. Recordkeeping proved to be a vital component to our efforts. When collections lacked the necessary paperwork or explanations of past actions, the time necessary to retrace or recreate work proved to be a considerable investment. Sometimes, we made assumptions about the actions of previous archivists; other times, we were able to track down missing paperwork in unlikely areas like our own early library files or the card catalog that was saved. These resources were vital to our being able to move forward with deaccessioning materials. We diligently documented all of the actions we took removing, transferring or reprocessing collections so that others will have clear records of how and why we made certain decisions. This project proved to be a valuable experience that advanced the work Special Collections was doing with audiovisual materials and improved our collections management practices.