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Locating Composition History

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> All of historical work, then, is provisional, partial—fragments we shore against our ruin. We are trying to make sense of things. It is always a construction. It is always tottering.
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> Robert J. Connors, "Dreams and Play"

Both archive and archaeology have their etymological roots in the Greek *arche*, whose principal meanings are: beginning, origin; and first place or power, sovereignty. The archive has descended from *archeion,* the residence or office of the magistrates where public records were kept; archaeology studies that which is *archaios,* ancient, in human material culture. The archival researcher (we have no archivologist) digs through boxes of files, slips of paper, bound volumes with pages and pages in different hands, books richly illuminated by tiny marginalia, now sometimes in microfiche, on magnetic tape, in file servers and Web sites; the archaeologist sifts through what is buried, in graves, in landfills, in the recycled walls and built-over rubble of

ancient cities, under volcanoes and floods. In the *archeion,* we catalogue the history of decisions—laws and decrees and elections—and their issue—judgments, sentences, tax assessments, rosters—and these are things that matter. In the burial grounds, we catalogue the artifacts that memorialize human activity—water jars, spoons, arrowheads, dolls and figurines, coins, jewelry, buildings, roads, obscure objects of beauty and desire—also things that matter.

The college archive preserves what has mattered to its teachers, administrators, and students. When one works in the archives, one finds not only the official records of enrollment, curriculum, and achievement, but also—often uncatalogued, undigested, uninterpreted—personal copies of books, notes, and papers that mattered to those who read and wrote in that place, at particular moments, on unique rhetorical occasions. Such items may be—most often, in fact, surely are—collected intermittently and without the kind of annotation that would help the researcher in the archives to assess confidently how typical —or not—were those moments and occasions at that place. Similarly, one cannot always trace the provenance of archival materials. Just who *did* deposit Box 643?

In dealing with historical artifacts as fragmentary and discontinuous as those in composition's archives, the authors of this volume have also paid attention to what we do not have and thus cannot read. We have finished essays, but not the assignments that generated them. We have lists of textbooks, but no explicit accounts of how they were used. We have the papers of a few students: were these students "representative"? Were these students' papers preserved by accident, or because they pleased the instructor who saved them, or because they showed the range of performances in a given class? As Connors reminds us, from the archives, provisionally, in fragments, one constructs histories.

The chapters in this volume construct local histories by drawing on a wide range of archival documents, including, but not limited to: faculty meeting minutes, personal letters, student literary magazines, alumni magazines, yearbooks, course catalogues, reports to the trustees, class notebooks, student essays, unpublished lectures, and mission statements. This book's contributors attempt to reconstruct how students—variously inflected by class, race, and gender—have learned to write at different times, in different places, with

different teachers, textbooks, and curricula, and how teachers, also at different times, in different places, have developed pedagogies, built curriculum and programs, and contributed to the emergence of a discipline.

Each chapter in this book tells a story. Kathleen A. Welsch locates composition history in Mahala Jay, a nontraditional student, married and twenty-two years old when she began at Oberlin, who, with her husband, began again at Antioch three years later when they learned that as a woman, Mahala could not read her graduation paper in public. Kenneth Lindblom, Will Banks, and Risë Quay set the story that Albert Stetson's professional essays tell about himself as a teacher against the epistolary narrative from the letters of Abbie Reynolds and her brother John, and conclude that Abbie's version of the story is much sadder than Stetson ever knew. Jeffrey L. Hoogeveen projects the history of curricular change in composition at Lincoln University, the oldest historically black university in the United States, on the screen of the contemporary civil rights movement events, which united its faculty and students for an extended moment between 1969 and 1974. Each arising from a particular place and time, these stories ground us in the specific and discrete circumstances of local writers, teachers, classrooms, and institutions that are diminished, forgotten, and lost.

The writings in this book can, and should, also be read as stories that connect to, disconnect from, comment upon, and contradict one another in many ways, ways that resist the construction of a unified narrative of the discipline. In her reflections on the 1988 CCCC, "Octalog: The Politics of Historiography," Sharon Crowley writes, "There are so few histories of rhetoric and composition studies in print that those which have been written and published so far have become much more authoritative than I imagine their authors ever thought they might be" (Newkirk 39). It is not our aim in composing *Local Histories* to construct a single narrative of composition history but rather to extend, challenge, complicate, and thereby enrich the narrative as it has thus far developed. From these local histories, one might begin to tease out several potential alternative histories. Composition's almost universal common feature —the first-year composition course—has encouraged the discipline to think of its history as the history of that course only, a history commonly believed to have begun at Harvard. In fact, the chronological primacy of Harvard in

offering a course in English composition is challenged by Patricia Donahue and Bianca Falbo's archival work on the career of Francis March at Lafayette. The disciplinary primacy of freshman composition is challenged by all of the contributors, generally, and specifically by Heidemarie Weidner's work on Butler University and Julie Garbus's work on Wellesley College. Beth Ann Rothermel and Patrice Gray both find that while elitist motivations affected the Massachusetts normal schools, faculty and students also resisted them in important ways. On the other hand, William DeGenaro, perhaps surprisingly, extends the narrative: he argues that the junior college movement, in its origins, resulted from the same elitist motivations that inspired the entrance examinations in writing at Harvard. In so doing, he challenges an equally powerful myth about disciplinary origins and institutional character: the myth of the two-year college as "democracy's college," an institution historically and ideologically committed to egalitarian and democratic values.

Local histories complicate the notion of students: not exclusively young, white males, not exclusively among the New England elite—but also women, even a married couple in their twenties, even midwesterners. They complicate the notion of teachers: not exclusively either rhetoricians or literature faculty, but generalists as well as specialists. Weidner and Garbus write about powerful women professors with innovative pedagogies. These histories complicate the notion of institution: not only the emerging university of colleges and divisions and departments, but colleges, normal schools, two-year colleges, and historically black colleges and universities constitute composition history. Indeed, Francis March's story of reading and writing suggests that the history of literature vs. composition—which even at the beginning of the twenty-first century has less explanatory power and descriptive accuracy at liberal arts colleges than at research institutions—is rich, nuanced, and complex. The local histories at Antioch College, Butler University, Wellesley College, and Lincoln University chart a history of teaching by generalists with a liberal ideal.

The chapters within also propose an argument for the flourishing of lively and diverse rhetorical practices:[1] the oral presentation of papers (Welsch); the cultivation of conversation (Weidner); the flourishing of literary societies (Welsch, Weidner, Garbus, Rothermel) and debating and dramatic clubs

(Rothermel, Gray); political activism (Hoogeveen). They propose alternatives to the prevailing late-nineteenth-century fixation on correctness: Weidner reads "accuracy of expression" in the practices of Catherine Merrill and her own student and successor Harriet Noble as a much more rhetorically complex problem than simply the grammatical and spelling correctness dictated by Illinois State Normal's Albert Stetson (Lindblom, Banks, and Quay). There is also evidence of imaginative and innovative pedagogies, engaging peer responses and multiple revisions (Weidner), service learning (Garbus), community-based research (Fitzgerald), writing across the curriculum (Donahue and Falbo, Weidner, Rothermel), and student-centered language (Rothermel).

In addition to their narrative components, this volume's chapters can be read as analyses of particular types of institutions. Composition's dominant historical narratives have located history in major research institutions whose institutional missions, teaching philosophies, intellectual ethoses, attitudes toward students, and student bodies are not universally shared by other kinds of institutions. The first four chapters locate history in liberal arts colleges. Kathleen A. Welsch's "Thinking Like *That*" reads the compositions Mahala Jay wrote at Antioch College in the 1850s; Patricia Donahue and Bianca Falbo reconsider the teaching of reading and writing from the example of Lafayette College in the 1850s; Heidemarie Weidner studies the careers of the first two holders of the Demia Butler Chair established in 1869 at Butler University; Julie Garbus analyzes the pedagogy of Vida Scudder, whose career at Wellesley College spanned forty years, from 1887 to 1927. These institutions share a peculiarly American faith in learning as conducive to—if not constitutive of—moral improvement and a related dedication to lives of service for the greater good, here manifest in the students' writings as well as in a much wider range of rhetorical practice by both students and their teachers. Even so, their histories are different in important ways. For example, Antioch, Butler, and Wellesley are all dedicated to the equal education of women, but the social positioning of women—and consequently their rhetorical positioning—changed significantly between 1853 when Mahala Jay matriculated at Antioch and 1927 when Vida Scudder retired from teaching at Wellesley.

The next four chapters locate composition history in normal schools,

two in the Midwest and two in Massachusetts. Until very recently, normal schools have been nearly erased from the narratives of composition. Yet their stories inform the stories of composition in the public elementary and secondary schools, whose graduates fueled, and whose teachers would bear the blame for, fresh outbreaks of literacy crises. Normal school students were assigned complex subject positions; made to feel somehow inferior, more suitable for training than education, but also responsible for transmitting the culture's values, or at least for enforcing its standards. Lindblom, Banks, and Quay conclude that the ethos of the Illinois State Normal University positioned working-class teachers in opposition to working-class students, and they locate that ethos in a rule-bound writing pedagogy that taught Abbie Reynolds that she could not write. Similarly, Beth Ann Rothermel finds that at the Westfield Normal School, the rhetorical curriculum narrowed toward the end of the nineteenth century, focusing on "how to speak and write correctly" rather than offering a broader and more complex program. In the archives at Fitchburg Normal School, forty miles from Harvard University, Patrice K. Gray reads Helen Bradford's understanding of her own positioning in a normal school: "This school is not a seminary or an institution where women can receive the higher education, but it is here that they can imagine what higher training would be and the joy it would bring them." Kathryn Fitzgerald does not read that particular tension at the Platteville Normal School in Wisconsin, but, attempting to follow a set of forty-four papers back to the assignment that gendered and engendered them, she cannot always hear the writers'—especially the female writers'—voices. It seems they were silenced by the demands for conformity to dominant subject positions concentrated in the genre of "student writing." However, in a few examples, Fitzgerald reads rhetorically deft manipulations of genre by which writers were able to simultaneously adopt and undercut the prescribed conventions of the assignment. Moreover, both Rothermel and Gray argue that even while external forces were narrowing the rhetorical curriculum in normal schools, a variety of extracurricular rhetorical practices greatly enriched students' educations. William DeGenaro locates composition history in the problematic rhetoric and ideology of William Rainey Harper, the "father of the junior college." In reading Harper's papers and books, DeGenaro not only follows the trajec-

tory of first-year composition, but parallels it to the particular discourse of "service," which subordinates general education and lower division courses to academic specialization and research. He acknowledges the same anti-democratic impulses that Lindblom, Banks, and Quay find at Illinois State Normal and reads the anti-aspirational rhetoric of discouragement that Rothermel and Gray detect in the Massachusetts normals during the same period. Like them, he recognizes the resilience of both two-year colleges and first-year composition to resist those discourses.

Finally, Hoogeveen locates composition history at a historically black liberal arts university. Focusing particularly on the years 1969 through 1974, he traces the alliance of students and faculty in calling for a curriculum and pedagogy across all humanities departments to equip them for the rhetorical demands of leadership in the civil rights movement. Hoogeveen, like DeGenaro, proposes parallel historical tracks, in this case, between the history of composition as a system of knowledge and the civil rights movement. The response he reads in the Lincoln University English Department's archives is less inspiring: some members of English respond to these calls as a literacy crisis, just as many other colleges and universities were doing, and issue warnings about appropriate diction clearly meant to ban Black English Diction. Just as Composition was beginning to define itself as a discipline with a special field of knowledge, the English Department began insisting on its expertise and ownership over the new course to be taught by colleagues across the curriculum.

THE CHAPTERS in this book are also studies of the archival materials—and the writers who produced them—that constitute their primary sources. A list of archival sources (which almost always require a researcher to be physically present and to hold the materials in her hands, although some archived materials are now available on line) appears at the end of each chapter, to identify the exact materials used, and to illustrate the kinds of materials one might find in an archive.

Among the artifacts that memorialize a college's life, teachers' assignments and students' writing are strangely rare. Garbus reminds us that even now, college students keep very little of their own writing, that teachers must

necessarily clean house of accumulated student writing from time to time, and that college archives still have little interest in preserving boxes of student writing that will be reproduced annually. Connors's explanation—that their creation in single copies or in only enough copies for the students in a class renders them unavailable to archivists for saving—makes sense ("Dreams and Play" 20), but he also implies that papers written in the first-year composition course simply have little value to their writers ("Writing" 58). While this lacuna in the record is problematic, the contributors to this volume locate composition history both through and across the curriculum and find several specimens outside freshman composition for analysis. Welsch has seven complete essays written by Mahala Jay between 1851 and 1856, and quotes extensively from them. Fitzgerald has forty-four unmarked papers, and both the fact that they were saved and the occasion she deduces for their composition testify to their significance, to the writers, and to the teacher. Gray draws on a collection of student theses from 1897 to 1910, and Rothermel alludes to a Westfield State Normal School student essay. These examples are not many, but they offer corroboration, and correction, to the idealizations of student writing projected in textbooks and pedagogical treatises.

Students' notes and notebooks, analyzed extensively by Garbus and Rothermel, are even rarer than finished papers and perhaps even more valuable to historians in approximating what students have really learned about writing and the teaching of writing. The normal school students Rothermel writes about were, after all, learning to be teachers; they carefully made notes about the goals and methods of rhetorical instruction for younger students as they were being trained. But, as anyone also knows who has ever looked over students' notes or collected "exit cards" recording "what I learned today" and "what I'm confused about" or "what is still a mystery," what is said or taught can be very different from what is heard or learned or read. Thus, Garbus comes to question some of Vida Scudder's personal assessments of her pedagogy because students' notes represent a somewhat different pedagogy. Weidner has found in Colin King's 1879–1883 diary of his Butler University education a very important record of the regular practices of peer review and revision in Catherine Merrill's courses. Similarly, in personal letters to family and friends, such as those read by Garbus, Lindblom, Banks, and

Quay and Welsch, students write candidly about not only what they're learning, but also how it feels to them. From Abbie Reynolds's letters home, for example, Lindblom, Banks, and Quay educe not only the errors-obsessed pedagogy described in Albert Stetson's curricular and pedagogical essays, but an overarching harsh and demoralizing composition pedagogy that students experienced at Illinois State Normal.

Another kind of archival source contributes to this more richly nuanced historical account of teaching and learning writing: an institution's occasional and celebratory pieces. Documents like Maud Goodfellow's "Historical Sketch and Lists of Former [Fitchburg Normal] Faculty and Students" (Gray), Herbert Sedgwick's "Record of the Class of 1886" typescript prepared for the [Westfield Normal] class semi-centennial" (Rothermel), Hilton Brown's "In the Heyday of the Literary Society" published in the *Butler Alumnal Quarterly*, and *Quarterly* editor Katherine Merrill Graydon's biography of Professor Catherine Merrill (Weidner) are epideictic; they do not pretend to be objective or analytical. But they offer insights into what students remembered and valued about their schools and their teachers, things that mattered. At Fitchburg in 1909, "The Faculty Meeting" skit's authors captured "a sense of the lived experience of this academic community that is impossible to discern in the official documents alone" (Gray).

Just as the skit documents the "lived experience" at Fitchburg, several of the authors in this volume reconstruct rhetorical education by looking more widely at the extracurriculum. Welsch knows more about Mahala Jay's reading during college than the college catalogue can tell her because she has also read the minutes of the Alethezetean Society, of which Mahala was a member. Rothermel has read issues of the Westfield student periodical, the *Normal Exponent*, from 1897, which add texture to the picture of turn-of-the-century thinking, academic life, and writing. The records of the school's nineteenth-century literary society, the *Normal Philologian*, record a wide range of rhetorical activities—dramatic readings, discussions, debates, extemporaneous speeches—on topics related to their vocation as teachers. In the yearbook, the *Tekoa*, she finds records of the debating and drama society active in the 1920s and 1930s, Delta Omicron Alpha—the Daughters of Athena, and learns that the 1929 topic was "equal pay for equal work." While an earlier issue of

Tekoa clearly relishes the pure fun of dramatic enactment, one also suspects that these young women, whose life work is increasingly defined as women's work and whose formal education as defined outside the institution by the state Board of Education is increasingly restricted and mechanistic, were passionately and intellectually engaged in their more serious 1929 topic.

Teachers' formal writings are surely as complex in their negotiation of various audiences, purposes, and subjectivities as student writings are. Essays on teaching matters, reports to supervisors and boards, even course descriptions represent ideals. If they do not, perhaps, perfectly match practice, they probably at least reflect a teacher's philosophy and intention. Or maybe they represent what a teacher thought the board or other colleagues needed to read, or expected to read, or wanted to read. Or they might, as Hoogeveen suggests of one faculty member's memos, belie political purposes quite contradictory to those stated. Thus, this volume—and several of its chapters—argues for a complex layering of institutional, teacher, and student documents. Donahue and Falbo reveal how the diary kept by Lafayette College valedictorian James Boyd between 1853 and 1859 includes his reflections on how his reading informs his writing. His papers are not preserved in the archive, but the diary discusses them at a tellingly self-conscious remove. Weidner shows how student Colin King's diary confirms that Catherine Merrill's pedagogy is represented in her course descriptions. Thus, when Weidner reads an 1872 committee report to the Butler Board of Commissioners quoting Professor Merrill on the need for "much more attention paid to the English language and literature," she is able to reconstruct Merrill's definition of good writing from a close reading of her course descriptions, as well as her published essay on Shakespeare, letters she wrote to friends, and an admiring letter from a newspaper columnist on her graceful style. These same materials permit Weidner to speculate about the influence on Merrill of the works of Genung and Newman, which Merrill might have known although neither authored Butler University's prescribed rhetoric text. Lindblom, Banks, and Quay present Albert Stetson's essays on grammar and spelling, prepared for an annual Teachers' Institute at Illinois Normal, which express not only his philosophy of language but also his classist assumptions about his students, assumptions that seem also to have been expressed in his teaching to Abbie Reynolds.

Official institutional documents—annual reports, course catalogues, faculty minutes—have formed the underlying structure of composition's historical narrative. All of the contributors to this book weave documents from teachers and students over the warp of the official record. But as Donahue and Falbo illustrate so strikingly, even these most public records contain information about composition's histories that has not yet entered the historical narrative. As composition's historians read, and read closely, the reports and catalogues and minutes of more institutions, the richly layered local histories will compose an ever richer, ever more complex historical narrative.

Finally, the archival materials for these local histories wrestle with the definition of the archive. DeGenaro discusses at length the problem of retrieving archival materials from an institution—or even a class of institution—that has not maintained an archive or, as in the case of many two-year colleges in their early years, even had a building of their own in which an archive might have been kept. DeGenaro argues that there are, however, primary sources from which we may construct a history of composition for the two-year college: in the locally published teacher narratives and essays published in small journals, or by in-house printing, or in conference proceedings. In such materials, he reads the narrative in which teachers, administrators, and the movement for specialization and science in the university position two-year colleges in general and composition in specific as service institutions. And, working on a historical period within living memory of some of his colleagues, Hoogeveen includes in his "archive" the ongoing memorial reconstruction of text that lives in conversation, allusion, gossip, and faculty chat.

Connors repeatedly reminded his readers as historians to face their own prejudices. We necessarily read the past from where we stand now. We are indignant on behalf of young women students whose rhetorical education was carried on in a separate sphere. When we find evidence for writing instruction diffused throughout an undergraduate education by the generalists who presided over American colleges in the nineteenth century, even as departmentalization was developing, some composition historians will applaud an antecedent of writing across the curriculum while others will bemoan the implication that teaching writing requires no special knowledge. And we nec-

essarily read from the perspective of the landmark histories written in the last fifty years, narratives that have located composition history at Harvard and University of Michigan and defined current-traditional as a system of beliefs and practices. Most composition scholars, including the authors of this collection, would probably, following Connors, name Albert R. Kitzhaber the author and originator of composition history and have learned from him and from the second generation of composition historians he inspired.[2] In the final chapter, Patricia Donahue reflects on Kitzhaber's exemplarity as a historian and on the ways that his work has taught the discipline to seek and find beginnings.

Local histories of composition test our theories about the influence of popular textbooks, innovative teachers, dominant pedagogies, and landmark curricular reforms. They challenge the dominant narrative of composition history, located in primarily elite research institutions, disrupting its apparent simplicity as the myth of origin and proposing alongside it a complicated and discontinuous array of alternative histories. We hope that this book will inspire our colleagues to find their ways into and around their own institution's archives and to produce many more local histories; each chapter's headnotes and self-reflective comments are intended to support new work. What S. Michael Halloran wrote in 1990 will remain true for several more decades: "What primary materials exist—textbooks, student manuscripts, diaries, lecture notes, college calendars and catalogues—have not been given the attention they deserve. . . . Much scholarship remains to be done before we can be confident of the story of writing instruction in America" ("From Rhetoric" 155). These chapters illustrate not only the variety of archival materials that document composition's histories, but the ways of reading that produce these histories. And, we hope, they serve as exemplars of an explicitly reflective critical practice.

Notes

1. The scholars whose archival work has been outside the university—in primary and secondary schools and in the "extra-curriculum" of writing groups, women's groups, literary societies, and the like—have, of course, already begun this alternative history

and their influences are noted throughout these pages: Arthur Appleby, Catherine Hobbs, Shirley Wilson Logan, Sarah Robbins, Lucille Schultz.

2. Connors called Kitzhaber the grandfather of composition history. As the essays repeatedly indicate, we, the grandchildren, are all enormously indebted to the work of the second generation, including (and here one inevitably risks omitting branches of the family tree) Katherine H. Adams, James Berlin, John Brereton, Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen Carr, Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, Wallace Douglas, S. Michael Halloran, Winifred Horner, Nan Johnson, Susan Miller, James J. Murphy, Stephen North, David R. Russell, Mariolina Salvatori, Donald Stewart.