

Political Archives: Defining Key Issues In A Significant Private Records Arena

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The political archives project has to date largely involved a comprehensive 'reappraisal' of the extensive political collections held by the John Oxley Library. Throughout this undertaking, it became clear that the appraisal of political party records in particular is a domain that has received little attention both within Australia and on a global scale. Very few collecting organisations have sought to systematically analyse what records they are keeping for posterity and why they are keeping them. This article, using the case example of the political archives project, endeavours to share findings and to stimulate further discussion about some of the important appraisal issues and challenges as they apply within this field of private recordkeeping.

Note: The opinions expressed in this paper are my own and not the official views of the State Library of Queensland.

Introduction

In a practical sense, appraisal raises many vexing issues for the archivist and it would seem that present theories and methodologies often lag behind some of our daily concerns and challenges. It must be said, however, that no matter how imperfect our theoretical framework, there will never be a simple answer or scientific quick fix to what are often subjective areas in our field.

This paper will not extensively re-evaluate the appraisal methodologies and theories that have generated significant debate thus far. Based upon extensive international consultation and using examples from the political archives project, this article serves to draw attention to key issues affecting the collection management of private political archives. It is also hoped that key dimensions of an important collecting area will be more fully articulated.¹

Political archives and their importance

Whether we like it or not, politics pervades almost every aspect of our lives to some degree and capturing evidence of its activity is therefore crucial to ensuring greater accountability. It would seem that greater accountability comes into play once private political collections stand as evidence of the manner in which political dealings are conducted and administered. Whereas the public record may at times offer a more sanitised version of events, the personal papers of politicians can reveal the unfolding of backroom deals and the evolution of decisions such as those that have led to the securing of major government loans. Increasing calls for greater public accountability within political parties have led to the adoption of legislation such as political disclosure acts, which require improved recordkeeping transparency concerning major political donations. While the master annual return documenting such donations becomes part of the official record, some may argue that the thread of accountability should extend to other processes such as political appointments and preselections.

Alicia Casas de Barran calls for an 'aggressive accessioning policy' for private papers that are not subject to any legislative requirements so that further papers are not lost from our heritage. She subsequently asserts the unique value of the private political papers held in the repositories of Uruguay and Argentina because unlike the official record, the private record may disclose the hidden aspects of historiography such as 'the personal, intellectual negotiation about how politics are achieved'. Importantly, the author also alludes to the fact that private papers offer a rich source of material for investigation and that this material 'may cause a revolution in how the subject area is viewed'.²

While preserving insights into the actions of our major political players is an important endeavour, capturing the archival record that documents our lobby groups and lone activists is also of immense value. The subject files of the Queensland political activist, Joe Harris, provide invaluable information regarding the struggles of society's activists, minor lobby groups and far-reaching political and social movements. Notably, correspondence documenting campaigns such as the independence of East Timor and Korean peace initiatives give an exceptional portrayal of the way in which major causes were defined and championed by such groups long before society became aware of them. Private political archives thus tend to better illuminate the activities of these unsung heroes and minor groups who continue to battle on the other side of the political spectrum. It is hoped that the planned acquisition of material relating to such groups will provide for a more socially inclusive and comprehensive record of a region's political heritage.

Private political archives may often contain the only authentic and comprehensive record of an event. Leader of Opposition correspondence files, not considered part of the official record in many jurisdictions, have been shown to unveil the kind of informal strategising that has led to the obtainment of government. Some of the record series within private political collections not only reveal the kind of scandalous information that makes biographers wealthy, but also help to give a portrait of the multiple private roles undertaken and key social causes championed by the political official. A Member of Parliament's case files may record interesting details concerning business partnerships established by the member as well as the grassroots opinions of marginalised groups who may not have had any other forum within which to voice their concerns.

The use of private political archives has demonstrated that they assist in filling vital gaps in the historical record. For example, the personal papers of former Queensland Premier, Sir Francis Nicklin, present a more complete and detailed account of the administrative challenges that he encountered within his own party while attempting to maintain a coalition government. While some argue that politicians by their very nature provide a certain frankness in public life that would leave little else left to disclose in the private record, some political donors have asserted that official documents and published parliamentary debates can be restricted in expression by their very format. It is therefore the personal annotations within private papers (sometimes recorded on copies of parliamentary debates and bills) that have occasionally revealed a more colourful and forthright view of events. The personal diaries of officials may also reveal the true reasons and human dynamics behind electoral losses and victories. This is exemplified in the diaries of former politicians that candidly reveal the kind of factional disputes that

can contribute to the downfall of an entire government. Overall, it may be said that the interplay of personality and informal political decision-making is often more vividly documented in the private than in the public record.

Queensland nineteenth century politicians were often among the wealthy landowners, businessmen, and journalists of society at that time. Today, political officials continue to wear many hats. As a result, much of Queensland's rich social history is to be found within their archives. Personal papers relating to former Queensland Premier, Sir Thomas McIllwraith, attest to the multiplicity of roles that he performed. In addition, as owner of an extensive property called Gin Gin station, his papers touch upon many aspects of the socio-economic history of Queensland in that they provide insights into the region's labour industry, race relations and significant land development issues of the time.

Consulting with record creators and users seems imperative when attempting to develop a useful methodology for the evaluation of our collections. Manfred Cross (former long-serving Federal Member for Brisbane and former Queensland Australian Labor Party State Secretary) has on many occasions kindly imparted his knowledge and provided the following insights concerning the potential research value embodied within private political archives:

- In a democracy, it is important for people to have access to private political archives. Transparency and accountability is intrinsic to this.
- Political archives give insight into the internal democracies that operate within a political party. For example, the manner in which party members are preselected as candidates or the extent to which a membership base is engaged in the process of policy development.
- Material of this nature can aid research into the political process itself. Such records may help to further the study of issues such as factionalism, leadership, and policy development.
- Private archival material, such as a Member of Parliament's case files, may allow one to assess the degree to which a person has represented an electorate.
- Political archives may document the role that a political official plays both within the party and the parliamentary process. A close study of the personal files of members, for example, may reveal the very mechanics of responsible government.³

Within the International Council of Archives, a special section dedicated to the Archives and Archivists of Parliaments and Political Parties was established in

1992. Among its many objectives, the section endeavours to emphasise the historical value of such archives and continues to network widely on a number of issues affecting the collection management of this material. The Chair of the section, Dr. Gunter Buchstab, has spoken at international forums about the importance of political parties and parliaments and the archives that they produce. He has in recent years commented that 'archival science has until now occupied itself far too little with the question of political parties, parliamentary groups and parliaments and their archives, despite their political and historical relevance.'⁴ Dr. Buchstab refers to the value of such archives against an inherent recognition of factors such as the following:

- Political parties and parliaments as 'complementary entities' and 'necessary components of democratic constitutional life.'
- Political parties serving to 'represent society as far as possible in all its nuances, differing interests and persuasions as well as currents of opinion, thereby forming a bridge of communication between state and society.'⁵

It is evident that the observations noted above demonstrate a research value beyond the traditional biographical and cultural values that are often ascribed to private archives.⁶ In essence, existing political collections have proven an invaluable resource as they can give a unique insight into the processes, policies and key players that have helped to govern society.

Key issues affecting the management of political archives

Among the many challenges encountered by institutions when dealing with political archives, the following issues may be considered to be some of the more predominant concerns that have been gleaned from international research. While the author is unable to explore each issue in detail, it is hoped that the following will offer some brief insights for further debate and highlight the unique nature of the material that we are managing.

Defining political archives

Collecting institutions have long been defining private political archives in varying degrees of scope and detail, and in accordance with their own administrative and legal environment.⁷ How political archives are defined has been further shaped by whether collecting institutions have entered into partner arrangements or 'mergers' with government archives. A large number of collecting bodies have struggled with a lack of definition and strategic focus within their collecting policies which has resulted in a reactive approach to the acquisition of political archives.

Consequently, many institutions have had to face the ongoing challenge presented by the ever-growing volume of private political records in need of a comprehensive model for evaluating their importance as archives. The sheer volume of such records, when combined with the added challenges posed by electronic records and operational constraints, necessitates that a systematic approach be taken to assessing the value of these records.

The size and scope of the State Library of Queensland's political archives project increased dramatically once it was realised that many of the library's archival holdings had a political aspect to them. While still attempting to take a proactive position in the definition and management of these archives, (through the creation of useful tools such as a disposal schedule and donation guidelines for politicians), there is still an evolving definition of 'political' and a continual tinkering of our appraisal methodology.⁸

There seems to be a general consensus amongst those collecting private political archives about the importance of retaining certain key records series that document political groups and their participants, such as the core minutes, reports and policy documents of the higher governing units of political parties; and the diaries, memoirs and biographical information of political officials. While we must still negotiate at an individual level with political donors, it would be advantageous for collecting bodies to collaborate and work towards the creation of an appraisal model that allows us to go beyond 'keeping minutes' and 'destroying financial records/routine office files'.⁹ In his paper discussing the appraisal of public television programs, Thomas Connors provides a useful exploration of the factors which were critical to developing a practical appraisal model eg, understanding the history of public broadcasting, the politics underlying that history, as well as examining those bodies responsible for producing programs.¹⁰ Like the appraisal of audio-visual material, the appraisal of political archives 'is still in its infancy' and can benefit from drawing upon existing appraisal theory and an increased understanding of the nature of the material itself.

Official versus personal material

There are many layers involved when appraising private political archives. Deciding what society remembers for posterity is already challenging in many respects, even more so when coupled with the difficulties of discerning when to weed corporate from personal material, or public from private papers. Provenance may be difficult to determine when many complex roles are undertaken by the political official. There are also many grey areas in defining what is public versus private as the boundaries between the two are not always clear. The governmental, parliamentary, party political and personal roles undertaken can and do often overlap.

During the extensive 'reappraisal' undertaken as part of the State Library of Queensland's political archives project, considerable time was spent removing public records that were interfiled within the private papers of politicians.¹¹ Generally, an administrative decision was made to retain copies of public records that form part of the archival integrity of the personal file eg, copies of public records may contain significant personal annotations and/or complement the personal correspondence that draws upon similar themes or issues. Subsequently, our appraisal entailed lengthy negotiations with the Queensland State Archives and donors before deaccessioning public records.

In response to the problems and issues at hand, some government archives are widening their briefs to include the personal papers of key officials in their acquisition strategies. For example, in consultation with Mitchell Library (State Library of New South Wales) and the New South Wales Parliamentary Archives, 'State Records New South Wales has adopted a policy whereby it may collect some personal records of prominent or key State officials, such as the records of Governors, Premiers, Ministers, Chief Justices, Leaders of the Opposition and leaders of minority parties.'¹² The National Archives of Australia has a personal records section that deals with the acquisition and management of personal papers such as those belonging to former Australian Prime Ministers.¹³ Archival institutions are therefore dealing in different ways with the unique challenges posed by issues which seem inherent to the nature of private political archives. I welcome further debate concerning this balancing act of where to draw the line in defining 'official versus personal', along with the issue of sorting out workable arrangements between institutions while helping researchers to get the complete picture.

Access and privacy

In addition to there being few legislative requirements for private recordkeeping, the boundaries for managing private political archives sometimes face the added challenges posed by issues of access, privacy, copyright and legal title. Such issues often come to the fore when copies of public records (subject to a standard 30 year restriction) are interfiled or annotated within personal papers that may have less than 30 year access restrictions stipulated by the donor. As we're challenged to operate according to the requirements of privacy legislation, new concerns are raised due to the vast amounts of confidential personal information found within private political archives such as Members of Parliament's constituency case files. Paul Dagleish of the National Archives of Australia has previously provided a useful exploration of some of the distinct appraisal challenges raised when dealing with personal political papers.¹⁴ Some of the varying appraisal challenges encountered within personal political papers are demonstrated in the example of

Member of Parliament Constituency files. A political donor may assign a relatively short access period to a large volume of these files upon donation. Does he or she have the authority to allow access to the often sensitive and third party information found within such files? Does the extensive volume and limited use of these files warrant their retention? Does published material or the public record (ie Minister's constituency files) already adequately document the function of a political official representing the interests of his or her constituents? To what extent should access and privacy concerns shape appraisal decisions?¹⁵

Robert Lawrie, Manager of the New South Wales Parliamentary Archives commented that 'quite apart from the privacy question', a scientific sampling of these files may suffice in certain circumstances.¹⁶ He asserts that 'the value of these files lies in the fact that they illustrate one of the basic functions of a Member of Parliament'. Mr Lawrie further remarks that while individual items in themselves may appear mundane, the collections as a body show their value and the value of the Member, '...and Members are basic not only to our democratic structure but also to the local community life of their electorate'. He warns that privacy can be taken too far when making appraisal decisions.¹⁷

Some other interesting opinions on the matter have been provided by Mark Epp, Senior Archivist, Political/Legislative & Sound/Moving Images Portfolio, Archives of Ontario:

Political papers usually have time-bound access restrictions written into donation agreements, but the personal information found in constituency files is not the donor's but belongs to hundreds of constituents. It is not really for the donor to decide whether access should be granted to third party personal information – or at very least there needs to be a recognition of this issue and an agreed means or mechanism for addressing it when the Archives is dealing with the donor. How do you adequately protect constituents' personal information in a way that does not become burdensome to the institution (or the donor)?¹⁸

It seems that there are benefits to be drawn from balancing a need to ensure key functions are captured in the archival record, along with developing a strategic approach to handling privacy and access concerns. While privacy adds a challenging dimension to negotiating reasonable access conditions with the donor, other factors may serve to shape and challenge the process of liaison and negotiation.

Liaison and negotiation issues

There are many unique issues that arise when liaising with political donors, both actual and prospective. In the absence of legislative requirements, it is common for collecting institutions to actively salvage and seek out possible transfers of

political material by means of purchase or donation. The intense public pressures and rapid turnover that occurs in the political arena fosters a recordkeeping nightmare. Negotiating legal donation terms and conditions in addition to acquiring support for undertakings such as the development of a disposal schedule can be made more challenging due to some of the following factors:

- political officials and political parties already have extraordinary demands placed on their time;
- pressures of electoral campaigning or serving in a public position;
- administrative complexity, multiple overlapping roles and poor recordkeeping;
- lack of awareness about the importance of recordkeeping and preserving corporate and cultural memory; and
- more pressing and competing corporate agendas.

Herb Hartsook, Curator of Modern Political Collections, South Carolina Library, University of South Carolina, considers the collection management of political records 'the most challenging archival work today' and accordingly made the following observations:

The main challenge we face in receiving the records of South Carolina's political parties is in maintaining a strong relationship with the party staff and leadership. Party activists tend to be young and mobile so the leadership changes with great frequency. Just when you've developed a good working relationship with a party chair, executive director, or office manager, they leave for another position. Then you have to cultivate that new person and gain their trust and convince them of the importance of retaining records of historic value and adding to their archive at your repository.¹⁹

While collecting institutions are continually grateful for donor contacts that may help to acquire archival donations that would otherwise have been lost to posterity, institutions operating in similar environments have spoken of the challenges that may arise when dealing with high profile donors and donor contacts during the acquisition and appraisal processes. For example, it has been shown that while there are benefits to drawing upon the administrative and historical knowledge of donors during the appraisal process, problems arise when the Archivist does not properly regulate this process. Comprehensive collection policies and consistent appraisal guidelines may help to provide the clarity needed to ensure that subjectivity is reduced to a minimum despite the ethical difficulties presented by the social and political milieu that one must operate within.

Archival practice in this area has revealed that the negotiation process may at times be influenced by whether a political donor is retired or in power. Some of the ethical dilemmas that may arise when dealing with elected officials include possible attempts to sanitise records or misuse collecting institutions as political pawns by means of efforts aimed at hiding official documents. Dealing with people who have an active public reputation brings out many ethical, legal and human issues. How these issues manifest themselves in appraisal is a topic for further study.

Appraisal and political records – an ongoing function

The problem of many institutions having always accepted material from political figures without appraisal is endemic and leads to many other challenges. For various reasons, archivists dealing with private records in general have seemingly undertaken little formal appraisal.²⁰ While there have been significant contributions, there appears to be a general limited availability of practical input and precedents on offer from the private records world to date.²¹ Much appraisal methodology and troubleshooting often derive from a government or corporate records context.²² There is therefore a significant need for greater networking amongst manuscript librarians, records managers and archivists if there are to be practical solutions to ongoing appraisal concerns. Due care also needs to be given to ensure that there isn't a widening of the gap between the academic archivist and the everyday practitioner.

The professional angst that comes with appraisal can often seem insurmountable as it is undoubtedly the most challenging task for the archivist. While operational constraints are a common and ongoing challenge for many cultural institutions, it is within this 'real world' framework that we must grapple with the additional appraisal challenges at hand. Determining research value is often a primary focus for collecting archives and one of the most subjective appraisal criteria to work with. There are often problems associated with defining parameters and interpreting the value of records in terms of research uses. For example, when retaining records because they document a significant or controversial event, how does one define 'significant' or 'controversial'?²³

At the State Library of Queensland, it was decided that before political collections could be made available for public access and display, an extensive reappraisal of the collections needed to be undertaken. While this is the most time-consuming and complex of project tasks, it is undoubtedly the most significant in helping to shine a light on the historical gems held within the collections. Naturally once temporary records are identified and removed from the collections, resources can be better directed towards making those records of permanent research value more accessible to clients.

While reappraisal is a process that brings its own challenges, I viewed the political archives project as a 'continuing appraisal' or even first time appraisal of some of the political collections. It seems more often the case than not that many archival institutions undertake reappraisal projects due to poor appraisal decisions of the past or little or no formal appraisal having been undertaken in earlier years. Conducting a reappraisal of 'dead records' brings some unique problems to bear. The difficulties of retracing provenance and original order for records donated many years ago may be exacerbated by the lack of administrative connection between the donor and the collecting body. Reappraisal has sometimes led to the very difficult and sensitive task of re-negotiating old donor agreements and/or attempting to locate a donor's heir.

There are a number of other collecting institutions that are rediscovering the need for upfront and proactive appraisal, regardless of whether operational constraints have prompted this shift.²⁴ While the practical concerns of space and resource constraints may sometimes be the impetus for reappraisal, the goal of appraisal remains the same, namely, analysing records or business processes to determine the value of records and consequently their disposal status. That is, 'the primary question about keeping records is "is it needed?" not how much does it cost to store it'.²⁵

The lack of a practical and comprehensive model for evaluating private political collections appears to pose one of our greatest challenges despite efforts being made in this area. Many of these issues could form the basis of an additional paper as there are a variety of complex factors involved when undertaking an appraisal of collections of this nature. For example, the debate regarding the comparative and ever-growing size of political collections versus their archival value, combined with the difficulties posed by adopting sampling techniques, are very much issues which are deserving of further exploration.

Survey – appraisal of political party records

I discovered through extensively consulting with more than 40 organisations in the United States, Europe, Canada, and Australia, that very few institutions dealing with private political archives have been able to conduct formal appraisal or develop standardised guidelines, particularly in relation to political party records.

Organisations such as the Richard B. Russell Library (University of Georgia Libraries), the Conservative Party Archive (Bodleian Library, Oxford) and the United Kingdom Labour History Archive and Study Centre (Manchester) are, however, among a minority that have undertaken to develop some records-based disposal schedules for the records of individual political parties.

Mark Greene, (former Chief of Manuscript Acquisitions at Minnesota Historical Society), has considerable appraisal experience with the records of Congress and provided the following comments concerning the state of appraisal of party records in the United States:

The appraisal of political party records has received virtually no attention here in the US, unfortunately. This is curious because conferences have been held and many papers published on the appraisal of the papers of members of Congress, and as you probably know we devote whole libraries to the papers of Presidents and their executive officers, but the parties who elect these people have been largely ignored. Indeed, there are many states where the records of the major parties have not yet found homes in repositories.²⁶

Betty Jo Moore, former Senior Archivist Political/Legislative Portfolio at the Archives of Ontario, Canada, remarked that she was not aware of any organisations that have developed disposal schedules for political parties in Canada. As with some public archives in Australia, the Archives of Ontario does however have guidelines for ministerial papers and a government-wide common schedule for Minister's Office Records.²⁷

The Archivists of the United States Congress have successfully engendered a culture of best practice recordkeeping for committee staff and member offices through the development of records management handbooks (with disposition based upon record types) in addition to archival workshops. Karen D. Paul (US Senate Archivist) noted that 'the preservation of party records is sporadic' compared with the more uniform plans to preserve congressional papers.²⁸ The Society of American Archivists (SAA) Congressional Papers Roundtable has also facilitated networking concerning consistent plans for the preservation of congressional papers and has successfully sponsored archival workshops.

The School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona in conjunction with Special Collections, presented a problem-solving workshop on the management of large congressional collections in March of this year. The following program outline of the workshop reveals that there are some useful parallels that the archivists of political party collections may be able to draw from the experiences of archivists working with parliamentary material. The types of appraisal considerations posed below are indeed relevant to all working with political archives.

Contemporary political papers present unique challenges for repositories and archivists. These are high profile collections that often arrive with much fanfare but with little understanding of what it takes to insure accessibility. The very nature of congressional papers calls some archival practices into question. The sheer bulk of

congressional papers also pose an archival crisis. This is variously described as lack of space, funds, time, and personnel required to process, administer, and support the unprecedented bulk found in congressional collections.

- What is the true value of this information?
- How can we control an avalanche of material without getting crushed under its weight?
- Can we process these collections without risking the entire budget or the repository mission?
- How do we balance institutional and donor expectations with user demand?²⁹

Although more recent and less developed, professional networks have been developing amongst archivists working with political party records. Many are calling for greater uniformity in the way that these records are appraised and preserved.³⁰ In January 2000, the Archives of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (ACDP) in Germany (archives of political foundations or political parties), attempted to develop some common criteria for archival appraisal and accordingly listed some record types which could be disposed of.³¹

The International Council of Archives (ICA), Section of Archives and Archivists of Parliaments and Political Parties has served as a useful vehicle for networking common concerns and is making efforts to increase its membership base and eventually achieve more unified standards for addressing common archival problems. Other such networks include the Political Parties and Parliamentary Archives Group, United Kingdom (PPPAG UK) and the California Political Papers Consortium (CPPC).

The ICA body the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA), has outlined proposals that also emphasise the need for greater standardisation in areas such as the evaluation of documents. In 2001, an entire CITRA was dedicated to the theme 'Archives and Society: What to preserve? Acquisition and appraisal'. At the meeting of the Section of Archives of Parliaments and Political Parties in Rome in 2002, some excellent papers were submitted on the core issues affecting the collection management of political party and parliamentary records.³²

Political archives project – case example

Scope

The political archives project, managed by the Original Materials Unit of the John Oxley Library, is a specialised archival project funded in recognition of the fact

that the archives of political parties, politicians, lobby groups and activists are considered to be of great cultural significance to the history of Queensland. More importantly, the project is aimed at ensuring that more than 500 metres of political resources (including thousands of photographs) are effectively appraised, arranged and described and made available for public access. The project also aims to actively identify and acquire a comprehensive representation of archival material from across Queensland's political landscape.

Following the 'reappraisal', we anticipate that the long term outcomes of the political archives project will include the mounting of a public exhibition on politics in Queensland, reader education programs, the production of online finding aids based on international standards for archival description and further reformatting of paper-based records to increase their accessibility.

Useful tools created

Functional disposal schedule for the records of political parties

Realising that an extensive reappraisal would require us to adopt a sound appraisal framework, it was suggested that an appraisal tool be developed that would have useful application for the records of all political parties.³³ Consequently, a functional disposal schedule for the records of political parties was developed based upon the technique of functional analysis. In essence, the technique serves to evaluate the importance of records by understanding 'the relationship between the records and the institution's functions'.³⁴

The schedule seems to be the first of its kind in that it is a generic functional disposal schedule for the records of political parties.³⁵ Some archival organisations have developed series-based schedules specific to an individual political party although it does seem apparent that there are no other organisations that have undertaken a functional analysis of political parties.³⁶ Functional disposal schedules have however been developed for organisations such as businesses, trade unions, universities and scientific bodies.³⁷

The functional disposal schedule for political party records was developed as an appraisal tool which would assist the individual parties and the Library with proactively identifying permanently valuable material to be retained in addition to systematically listing transactions likely to produce temporary records that could be destroyed. Every archivist appraises within a unique organisational culture which encompasses factors such as appraising in accordance with the core objectives outlined in the organisation's collection policy. The acquisition of material relating to political parties and politicians has been identified as one of the high collecting priorities for the Original Materials Unit of the John Oxley Library.

The disposal schedule was consequently tailored to support the collecting purposes and priorities of the John Oxley Library. Many collecting and research institutions such as the John Oxley Library aim to acquire a snapshot of the history of many private organisations within their jurisdiction, rather than operate in the manner of a corporate or government archive that also protects and supports organisational accountability.

Adopting a post-custodial approach, the schedule will hopefully perform the tandem role of enabling the Library to acquire a representative sampling of the history of the parties in Queensland, as well as providing the parties with a document that aids in preserving their accountability and corporate memory. An ongoing deposit relationship is being established with particular parties which enshrines this post-custodial emphasis. While the schedule is still in draft form and yet to be fully tested, the identification of common functions at the very least, has helped in making consistent decisions concerning the shaping of our political heritage.

Why a functional approach?

Among the reasons noted above, there were some other influencing factors which caused us to adopt this approach:³⁸

- Functions were seen as more stable elements to assess than record types, especially as the recordkeeping systems of political parties are often quite ad hoc.
- Political parties share core common functions – all parties manage themselves, hold conferences to determine party policy, stand candidates to run for office with the aim of becoming government, manage members, and endeavour to increase their broad public profile. They have both an organisational wing and a parliamentary wing.
- A 'top down' approach helps to grasp the bigger picture of capturing for posterity the 'best' records documenting the significant functions and activities of the organisations.
- A functional approach facilitates the mapping and planning of the documentation of Queensland's political heritage in a way that is consistent for all.
- A functional approach may assist in identifying gaps in the documentary record of an organisation which could then be actively filled through other activities, such as an oral history program.³⁹

- A functional approach captures a more impartial documentary record and helps to reduce subjectivity to a minimum.
- By identifying vital functions and therefore vital records, a better-informed and proactive collection policy may result.

Process in developing the schedule

Initial work on the schedule involved undertaking extensive research into the administrative and historical context of political parties through studying sources such as party constitutions, rules, manifestos, histories, minutes and organisational charts. Following a functional analysis, a comprehensive records sampling of existing political collections was conducted. Through this sampling, a selection of record types could be listed against the different transactions outlined in the schedule. This assisted in the practical usage of the schedule.

The *Keyword AAA* thesaurus, produced by State Records NSW, was used and adapted for the purposes of the schedule. Helen Samuels, renowned for her leading work in functional analysis and author of *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (1992), offered some invaluable advice during the development of the schedule. She agreed that it would be viable to develop a generic schedule for political parties and offered some useful suggestions:

- Functional analysis should be at 'a level of generality' that reflects the activities of all political parties.
- The number of functions should be in the 5-7 range.
- There must be an administrative function eg, 'Sustain the Institution'.
- Following an identification of functions, there needs to be an analysis of the documentary problems for each function eg, 'each organisation has an administrative function, the problem being that there are too many records documenting this function so you need to select the small amount required for long term retention'.
- Functional categories should not be artificial – such categories should 'derive naturally from the organisations so that the resulting terminology is meaningful.'⁴⁰

Continuing to follow Helen Samuels' lead, functions were developed by consistently focusing on the question, what do political parties do? I arrived at several key functions that appear to be common to all political parties. A hierarchy of function, activity and transaction was used within the schedule. The following list outlines the key functions that were selected for the schedule in addition to *some* of the

activities identified within each functional grouping. The transactional level has not been included in this example.

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT (OR PARTY GOVERNANCE)

- Managing party forums
- Elections (or Representatives)
- Establishment
- Policy Development
- Parliamentary Affairs
- Party Communications

ELECTORAL MATTERS

- Elections (or Representatives)
- Routine administration
- Internal party reporting
- Campaign Education
- Addresses
- Research

MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT

- Process of maintaining membership
- Process of maintaining membership data
- Educating party members
- Enrolments and accepting resignations

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- Donations
- Fundraising
- Media relations
- Honours, awards, prizes
- Enquiries and liaison
- Greetings

- Complaints and suggestions
- Visits
- Celebrations, ceremonies, functions

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

- Advice on policy
- Agreements on policy
- Reporting
- Monitoring eg, 'enemy' files
- Enquiries and liaison
- Greetings
- Complaints and suggestions
- Party participation and input in external forums

SUSTAINING THE PARTY

- Records management
- Personnel
- Travel
- Financial management
- Industrial relations
- Inquiries
- Legal matters
- Property management

The analysis focused on the goals and strategies of political parties and how these are pursued through broad functions and activities. In deciding the relative importance of different functions and where the most important functions took place, advice was sought from various party officials in addition to seeking input from some historians. Throughout this consultation, I remained mindful of the way in which parties interact with society and which transactions best record this. Following this identification, the schedule then became a tool which could shape the appraisal process. While functional in its wider approach, actual appraisal followed and involved the application of standard appraisal criteria such as evaluating content,

use, intrinsic value, relationship to other documentation, and political and institutional factors.

The disposal schedule is still very much a working and living document and, like any schedule, will need to be periodically updated and tailored to the respective parties if it is to remain functionally viable. In sum, I discovered through functional analysis that the minutes, conference reports and proceedings of the parties' chief governing units tended to best document the most significant functions of the party. Where such records have not survived, 'the next best' record was then examined which would capture the vital functions of a party such as the State Secretary's correspondence.

Donation guidelines

In addition to the schedule for political parties, a brochure was developed entitled, *Donating Personal Papers – Guidelines for Politicians*, and this also forms part of the proactive rather than reactive approach that the library is endeavouring to adopt. The brochure shortlists some examples of 'usually permanent', 'usually temporary' and 'conditional upon appraisal' record types in addition to offering definitions to educate in the area of personal recordkeeping eg, clarifying the distinctions between personal and official, and cabinet and parliamentary committee papers. In addition to the application of other standard appraisal criteria, a functional approach to appraising politician's papers is being increasingly utilised ie assessing the value of files based upon the extent to which they represent the core functions and activities of the official. The feasibility of developing a functional schedule for politicians' papers is being considered as officials often have complex careers and perform a multitude of similar functions. These may encompass parliamentary roles, official government roles, party political activities, in addition to personal activities such as club memberships, non-political careers, and family roles eg, father, husband, son. The creation of a disposal schedule and donation guidelines, while key project outcomes in themselves, have assisted us in retaining an important body of material that is considered of permanent worth for our collecting purposes.

Lessons learned

The following section is a synopsis of some of the main lessons that were prominent throughout the course of the project. This listing may highlight what many may argue are imperatives for a successful appraisal project.

- Embracing our post-custodial role – We should be more proactive in the way that we manage collections; that is, look for opportunities to fill gaps in the documentary record and ensure unheard voices are finally

heard. Principles of social inclusion can be incorporated into the collection management policy.

- Despite some of its widely debated weaknesses, functional analysis offers some tangible benefits for the collection management of private political archives.
- A sound appraisal framework is required – Proactive and formal appraisal strategies, in addition to a more comprehensive and well-researched collection policy, may assist in averting the problems that come with reappraisal.
- Obtaining advice from stakeholders such as records users and creators is important when deciding what is to be kept for the future, and there should be mechanisms to facilitate such input. For example, input was received from historians that enabled us to bear in mind the importance of retaining records documenting social history, such as club membership records that reveal the socio-economic background of the political official. Advice from records users and party officials played a useful part in the consideration of records documenting those who lost as well as won electoral battles. In addition, this advice served to draw attention to the research value of certain party policy drafts which resulted from the consultative processes between policy committees and various lobby groups.
- Striking a balance – to be neither reactive custodians nor unduly influenced by the donor or records users. We must not fall captive to the external demands of any one group. Developing clear and formal appraisal strategies may help us to be more impartial in our selection of archival material and not to be dictated to by society's most powerful or outspoken.
- Make the appraisal process more transparent to the public (for example, by documenting appraisal decisions) and increase awareness of the importance of recordkeeping (for example, by encouraging parties to create in-house archives to ensure corporate memory is preserved).
- Be clear in the collection policy. Ensure that donors are aware of the nature of our collecting goals and priorities eg, the Library is unable to operate as an in-house archive for corporate donors.

- We need to go beyond the traditional appraisal of record types eg, 'keep all minutes' and consider elements such as functions, structures and people and the way that they interact in order to get a more representative analysis of what is historically valuable.⁴¹
- A comprehensive, accountable and transparent project management framework, along with a strong organisational commitment to appraisal projects is essential to their success.⁴²
- There is a need for greater convergence, mentorship and professional networking across the private and public recordkeeping domains and for all who fall under the umbrella of knowledge management.

Conclusion

Considering the pivotal role that political parties and their participants play in influencing government and society, it seems imperative that there be a proactive stance in relation to the appraisal of the evidence which results from their activity. Upfront and timely appraisal is essential to forming a collection that will tame the massive volumes of political material by capturing the small percentage of records that embody the essence of our political heritage.

A sound methodology for the appraisal of private political collections is an important endeavour which, along with professional literature on the topic, remains in its early stages. Besides many of the key issues addressed in this paper, one of the most difficult matters to resolve during the political archives project has been the challenge of developing a methodology that is not too inclusive to the point of lacking definition, or involving only broad application of numerous appraisal criteria.

Throughout the project's continuing challenges, I'll proceed with a firm conviction shared by many other colleagues, that 'appraisal is the archivist's first responsibility from which all else flows'.⁴³ As part of this responsibility there is an additional duty to heed the call of many archival professional networks that are rallying towards a more informed and unified approach to discerning what should be preserved for future generations.

While being unable to address each issue in its complexity, it is hoped that this paper will encourage colleagues in the field to take up some of the issues at hand, and explore them further in the hope that there will be a more practical and informed methodology for this significant domain within the private records arena.

ENDNOTES

1 While the project challenges that have presented themselves have made for lonely territory, I would like to thank the many local, national and international organisations that have freely given advice and support during the steep and continuing learning curve that is appraisal. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Ann Pederson, Sigrid McCausland and Cassandra Findlay for their input and advice during the compilation of this paper.

2 Alicia Casas de Barran, 'The New History and Private Papers in Uruguay and Argentina', *Comma*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2002, p.170.

3 Interview with Manfred Cross, Jul 2002.

4 International Council on Archives, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 'Political Parties, Parliamentary Groups, Parliaments and their Archives', at www1.kas.de/archiv/artikel_buchstab.html.

5 *ibid.*

6 Paul Dalglish, 'The appraisal of personal records of Members of Parliament in theory and practice', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no.1, May 1996, pp.86–101. Paul Dalglish comments on the differing approaches to the values held within personal records collections. Our Political Archives Project has adopted a dual approach, ie cultural/biographical and historical/evidential in recognition of the fact that the approaches are not considered mutually exclusive.

7 For examples of how specialised political collections are defining political archives, see: Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries at <http://www.libs.uga.edu/russell/>; Archives of the University of Colorado at Boulder at www-libraries.colorado.edu/ps/arv/col/politics.htm; and the Modern Political Collections division of the University of South Carolina's, South Carolinian Library at <http://www.sc.edu/library/socar/mpc/>.

8 The State Library of Queensland has assigned a high collecting priority to acquiring private political archives which, irrespective of format, document Queensland's political heritage from 1859 to the present. 'Political' for the purpose of the political archives project has been broad in its scope in that it has targeted the acquisition of private archives produced by political parties, and members of Parliament in addition to the collections created by Queensland's non-elected officials, key activists, and political advocacy groups. Within the State Library of Queensland, donation guidelines such as those created for political officials, have helped to control the flow of documentation by offering further definition of the types of material preferred by the library. The reappraisal process to-date has led to a number of revised recommendations being submitted to amend the present collection policy so that it encompasses a more targeted and strategic approach to the acquisition of political material.

Efforts are always made to ensure that our acquisitions are relevant to our jurisdiction and that no overlap occurs with the collecting priorities of any other institution eg the National Library may acquire the papers of a Queensland federal Member of Parliament who played a pivotal role in federal affairs and is considered to be of national prominence.

9 There are many record series that would benefit from a more detailed evaluation model eg large volumes of campaign files, press releases, nomination files, State Secretary's correspondence, and the extensive quantities of realia, constituency files and subject files maintained by officials. Note that material such as constitutions, party platforms and party periodicals are commonly considered of permanent worth but such items may be classified or administered in different ways depending upon the institutional setting of the archive eg identified as publications and transferred to general library holdings.

10 Thomas Connors, 'Appraising Public Television Programs: Toward an Interpretive and Comparative Evaluation Model', *The American Archivist*, Vol.63 (Spring/Summer 2000), pp.152-174.

11 Reappraisal is defined as: *The process of reevaluating the holdings of an archives or manuscript repository to determine which holdings should be retained and which should be deaccessioned. Reappraisal is also known as retention review.* (State Records NSW, at www.records.nsw.gov.au/publicsector/rk/glossary/glossary-01.htm#P824_35213). Note that the John Oxley Library does not have the legal mandate to acquire public records. The management of private/personal records versus public/official records differs between institutions as enforced by the organisation's collection policy and relevant legislation.

12 Amanda Barber, Manager Government Recordkeeping, NSW State Records, provided the following response when I enquired as to the rationale behind this joint decision:

State Records felt that there was an appropriate and useful role for State Records in the collection and management of certain and limited categories of personal records. We see our role as complimenting [sic] the collecting activities of the State Library (Mitchell Library) and the Archives of the NSW Parliament. Some of the reasons behind our decision are:

- *the often significant difficulties in separating out strictly State records (that is records relating directly to official government business) from closely related private or personal papers. In particular, this can be a difficult (and sometimes artificial) distinction to make with records of Government Ministers, where political life, parliamentary duties and ministerial activities can be closely intertwined;*
- *the benefits of retaining certain personal records with official State records. The broader picture provided by retention of related material can significantly enhance our knowledge and understanding of political and other events and also add to our understanding of the issues, forces and influences that may affect decisions and actions of those occupying high office.*

13 See the National Archives of Australia website for further information regarding their collecting focus in this area and the defining of Commonwealth records versus private records. The National Archives has developed formal guidelines for the acquisition of its personal material. See online at www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/personal/summary.html

14 Paul Dagleish, pp. 86-101.

15 *ibid*, pp. 86–101. Paul Dalgleish looks at the appraisal of constituency files and discusses the practical challenges involved when appraising the papers of Members of Parliament. He also offers some useful discussion concerning the distinctions between official and personal documentation.

16 In this instance, one must be wary of reducing subjectivity and retaining not just a sampling of files belonging to Premiers and senior officials, who often stem from urban electorates, but also look into sampling files maintained by a rural member.

17 Email, Manager of NSW Parliamentary Archives, Robert Lawrie, 15 Nov 2002.

18 Email, Mark Epp, Senior Archivist, Political/Legislative & Sound/Moving Images Portfolio (Archives of Ontario), 3 Dec 2002.

19 Email, Herb Hartsook, Curator of Modern Political Collections, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, 9 Nov 1999 and 25 Nov 2002.

20 There is some dispute among archivists who consider appraisal to be a form of partisan analysis that should not be undertaken, especially once a collection has already been accepted from a donor.

21 As a matter of qualification, I surveyed a large number of manuscript libraries both within Australia and overseas and believe that I have enough evidence to conclude that there is a noticeable trend of little formal appraisal having been undertaken within the private recordkeeping world.

22 Despite this, appraisal guidelines and criteria as developed by organisations such as the Society of American Archivists, National Archives of Canada, National Archives of New Zealand and National Archives of Australia have some useful application for those involved with private records appraisal.

23 Tony Newton, 'Will the Tension Ever End?: Some Observations and Suggestions from an Appraisal Archivist', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 2001, pp.86–97. Tony Newton explores this issue in further detail and raises some important questions.

24 Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW interview 28 Nov 2002. A/Manager of Original Materials Branch, Robert Neville, noted that there is a relatively new strategy, encompassing new library donation guidelines, which is being implemented 'to streamline the acquisition process'. He remarked that 'institutions have a right to be much more proactive in determining what they accept, than perhaps they have traditionally been in the past'. The guidelines, while not rigid, place more onus on the donor (where appropriate) to assist in arranging and listing collections.

25 Rick Barry, Aus-Archives listserv, 'The professional virtues of re-appraisal', 11 May 2001.

26 Email Mark Greene, 2002.

27 Email Betty Jo Moore, Senior Archivist, Political/Legislative Portfolio, Archives of Ontario, 11 February 2000.

28 Email Karen D. Paul US Senate Archivist, 7 Jan 2003. Karen D. Paul also added that 'At the state level, there is an effort to encourage the development of codumentation centers

for political/congressional studies. Where this is happening, the state party records make a logical addition to the holdings'.

29 "Archives of EPIC Proportions: A Problem Solving Approach to Managing Congressional Papers" March 20–21, 2003 at <http://www.sir.arizona.edu/seminar/>

30 International Council on Archives, p.11.

31 Reinhard Schreiner, 'The rules of the Archives of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (ACDP) in Germany', at <http://www.google.com.au/search?q=cache:OyUw2sVvs7sC:www.spp-ica.org/files/docs2002/Schreiner.doc+Archives+of+the+Konrad+Adenauer+Foundation+&hl=en&ie=UTF-8>

32 International Council on Archives, 'Meeting of the Section of Archives of Parliaments and Political Parties', at www.spp-ica.org/files/Publica_Roma_2002_ing.htm

33 I wish to acknowledge that Karen Friedl, the then Project Manager recommended that a generic disposal schedule of this nature be developed. I would also like to express my thanks for her input, guidance and advice whilst developing the schedule.

34 The Society of American Archivists – Documenting Society Reading, 'Tools for Selection: Appraisal Guidelines and Criteria', at file:///D:/Reader/04ham.htm

35 To qualify, I have widely consulted with many archival institutions in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia from Oct 1999 to the present. I welcome feedback from any organisations that may have been omitted in terms of those who have adopted a more functional approach to the appraisal of political party records.

36 Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the UK Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester are some of the organisations that have undertaken to develop series-based disposal schedules for political parties.

37 For example, Helen Samuels' publication, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (1992) comprehensively explores the functional analysis of universities. The House of Lords Records Office (The Parliamentary Archives), London, are currently implementing a classification scheme based upon Keyword AAA and are moving towards appraisal largely based on function/activity. It will later develop disposal schedules based upon the example of those created by the National Archives of Australia (Email 12 Dec 2002, Stephen Ellison). A functional approach is also demonstrated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 'AAAS History & Archives – Scientific Association Records Programs: A Beginner's Guide – How to Set up a Records Program', at <http://archives.aaas.org/guide/guide4.php>.

38 See Thomas Connors, pp.163 for alternative models where a functional approach has not been adopted.

39 Email, Herb Hartsook, Curator of Modern Political Collections, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Supervisor of the Legislative Papers Project and Chair of the Congressional Papers Roundtable, 9 Nov 1999 and 25 Nov 2002. Herb Hartsook noted that while the majority of his holdings relate to fundraising and contested

primary elections, he also has an active oral history program in place that may help to fill gaps in the documentary record.

40 Email Helen Samuels, 8 November 1999.

41 Terry Cook (Clio Consulting and University of Manitoba) is renowned for his leading work concerning appraisal strategies (ie macro-appraisal or functional appraisal) and has often argued that we should analyse these elements as part of discerning society's values to assist in selecting archives which are more socially inclusive. Terry Cook has presented many professional papers on Canadian appraisal methodologies and experiences.

42 Tony Newton, from p.92 Tony Newton explores the important issue of 'Who decides what in the appraisal process and are they best placed to make those decisions?'

43 Terry Cook, 'Overview of Appraisal: Why Are We Here This Week?', Presentation to COFSTA