

*Elusive Archives: Material Culture Studies in Formation.* Edited by Martin Brückner and Sandy Isenstadt. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2021. 286 pp. Hardcover. \$89.95. Softcover. \$39.95.

*Elusive Archives* is the first volume in a series published by the University of Delaware Press called Material Culture Perspectives. It includes essays by several individuals who have been involved with the University of Delaware's Center for Material Culture Studies and the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture. Editors Brückner and Isenstadt, who also serve as the series editors, were formerly the codirectors of the Center for Material Culture Studies and are now affiliated faculty with the center. Brückner is director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, while Isenstadt is professor and chair of the Art History Department at Delaware.

The volume both expands and complicates the definition of "archives," with chapter authors looking at the written word and photographs as well as three-dimensional objects and geographic locations, and even the absence of these things, to discuss material culture. The focus is largely on what the contributors call "fugitive archives," or objects that do not necessarily make their way into cultural heritage repositories for preservation. Brückner and Isenstadt frame this approach as a direct response to the postmodern archival turn that has taken place in other humanities disciplines but has largely been missing from material culture studies. The book editors have divided the volume into four sections, including "Archives in Practice"; "Archives in Objects"; "Archives in Places"; and "Archives in Circulation." It is an interdisciplinary work, with authors coming from history, literature, archives, material culture, art history, and architecture and design backgrounds. Some chapters are more formal than others with the expected citations and footnotes, while some chapters describe individual authors' experiences working with fugitive archives in a more personal manner.

The volume raises several questions about appraisal for archivists: What should be kept? What stories do the materials we preserve tell us? Does everything need to be preserved, even after it has come to a museum or archives? Many of the items and collections of materials discussed in this volume come from marginalized communities or ordinary individuals whose archival traces have frequently not made their way to a formal institution to be preserved. One example includes photographs from a Crow community in Cindy Ott's chapter "A Historian Walks into a Bar . . . Or, a Story about Alternative Ways of Finding and Using Archives when the Normal Avenues Don't Cut It." Many of the authors rely on ephemera, trash, or items that were typically discarded to tell stories about both the objects and the people who created and used them, as discussed in Alexandra Ward's chapter "Decoupage: Cutting Ephemera and Assembling Sentiment," Lu Ann De Cunzo's "Buried Archives" chapter about trash studied by archaeologists, and Natalie Elizabeth Wright's chapter on Ikuro Yokoyama's motorcycle swept up in Japan's 2011 tsunami and left to decay at the Harley-Davidson Museum in Milwaukee.

Some authors use the absence of objects to make their arguments, as Jennifer Van Horn does in her chapter on the missing portrait of the enslaved Ryan Homer, or J. Ritchie Garrison does in the chapter "John Hancock's Fugitive Tar." Laura E. Helton's chapter,

“Historical Form(s),” notes the irony of the forms kept from the Negro Manuscripts Unit in the Historical Records Survey at the National Archives and Records Administration, in that “the forms . . . now have the curious status of being archival descriptions of unarchived material—because ultimately, most of the records the unit inventoried were never deposited in a formal repository” (p. 54). Other authors are interested in looking at archives in situ, such as Michael J. Emmons Jr. in his chapter on signage and symbology found in eighteenth-century buildings in the Mid-Atlantic region, or Sarah Wasserman in her chapter on the human response to “Underpass Mary” in Chicago, where water seepage appeared to create an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

Coming from a material culture perspective, the authors are interested in the materiality of archival materials, how objects have meaning, and how humans invest meaning in those objects. In this context, the term “objects” can encompass not only human-made items, but also the geographies and places where those items are situated. This is particularly apparent in Catherine Morrissey’s chapter on the Underground Railroad in Delaware, in Kaila T. Schedeen’s chapter on Native artist Will Wilson, and in Torsten Cress’s chapter on visiting the Lourdes shrine in the French grotto, as well as in the two chapters focused on German *Fraktur* and religious history written by Alexander Lawrence Ames and Oliver Scheiding, respectively.

The one area I wish more of the authors, or at least the series editors, had discussed is the use of what archivists would typically refer to as “archival” materials—the written word, photographs, and other documentary evidence—to support their research, and how the absence of such evidence has made their research more difficult. Some of the authors do enter into this discussion through analyses of unknown provenance for objects. For example, Rosalie Hooper describes a chest-on-frame that exists at the Winterthur Museum, but it is unclear who created and used it. Relatedly, several others use archival sources to describe the absence of objects, of which all we have left is the written word. Wendy Bellion, for example, describes using Charles Wilson Peale’s papers to reconstruct experiments with instruments “long gone” (p. 27). Kiersten Thamm’s chapter is an example of marrying the existing archival material with the object still in existence; her “*The Chaise sandows: Object as (Obscured) Archive*” uses a variety of primary and secondary sources to illustrate the complicated history of the creation and use of a piece of furniture to argue that design museums should engage more with providing the context for the many people involved in creating these items, not just the well-known designers. These individuals include rubber plantation workers in French Indochina and workers in Alsace-Lorraine, which the author argues was being treated as another colonial district by the French government. On the whole, however, given the volume’s focus on “fugitive archives,” I wish more authors had brought awareness of the tension between objects being studied and the documentary evidence *about* those objects to their work.

The volume is lavishly illustrated, with several color photographs associated with each chapter. My favorite section is “Archives in Places” because I am fascinated by how people can connect to other times and perspectives when physically in a place, and these are some of the most holistic chapters for making those connections. Some of these

chapters include Spencer Wigmore's discussions of Albert Bierstadt and the mining industry, Catherine Morrissey's examination of the Delaware Underground Railroad, and Michelle Everidge's focus on one of the Japanese concentration camps in California.

This volume challenges archivists to broaden their definitions of archives and what can be considered archival material. It also challenges us, again, to be more inclusive about whose stories we preserve. Chapters can be read alone, and several could be useful in archives classes, either to help students consider questions of appraisal or to demonstrate how research in archival sources can create new scholarship. This volume is an excellent read for any archivist interested in how their work intersects with the broader field of material culture studies.

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