

# Archiving the History of Economics

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## 1. *Why Archive?*<sup>2</sup>

UNLIKE SCHOLARS in many other disciplines, economists show little organized concern for preserving disciplinary archives. Consider the contrast between the community of mathematicians and the community of economists: the American Mathematical Society and the Mathematical Association of America have embarked on a joint project to preserve official archives and to advise individuals and groups about the preservation of personal and organization-related papers: these two large organizations have recognized that mathematicians' "personal papers and the records of mathematical institutions and organizations are a *source* for an understanding of [mathematics'] history."<sup>2</sup> The American Economic Association, on the other hand, has given scant attention to archival records and related materials (although the AEA did give a grant to sub-

sidize the publishing of the Irving Fisher Papers). It is curious indeed that while economists are tremendously concerned with data and inferences made from data, historical records like those found in archives are one type of data which economists systematically ignore. This means that the records of economists, their contributions to the larger social and political entity, their institutional connections to the colleges, universities, research organizations, and government agencies with which they have been associated, are in fact not systematically preserved. As a step toward remedying this, we offer here an overview of where archival resources are to be found, what they contain, what is their value in research and teaching, and how economists can begin thinking about saving their professional papers.

## 2. *Archive Contents and Their Value for Research and Teaching*<sup>3</sup>

Large archives of economists' papers can be found at the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the

<sup>1</sup> E. Roy Weintraub: Duke University; Ted Gayer: Georgetown University. Spencer Banzhaf and Stephen Meardon are Duke University graduate students in Economics. We have had useful comments on earlier drafts from Craufurd Goodwin, Neil DeMarchi, Ross Emmett, Robert L. Byrd, Robert Leonard, John Pencavel, and two anonymous referees.

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added: see the website <http://www.ams.org/mathweb/Hhistory/archive-comm.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Since at present there is no adequate substitute for visiting the physical site of an archive, scholars need to learn which archives exist, what they contain, and how to use them. We take cognizance of the remarkable work done earlier by A.

London School of Economics (Edwin Cannan, Hugh Dalton, Roy F. Harrod, James E. Meade, John Stuart Mill, Richard H. Tawney, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and others), and at the Marshall Library of Economics at Cambridge University (John Neville Keynes, Alfred Marshall, A. W. (Bill) Phillips, Arthur C. Pigou, E. Austin G. Robinson, and others). The Hoover Institution at Stanford seeks to collect papers of economists involved in work connected to that institution's mission, and the Presidential Libraries (as branches of the National Archives) collect papers of economists who were connected to the American presidents who have such libraries. Moreover, the Library of Congress has collected the papers of Abba Lerner, John von Neumann, and several other individuals of interest to historians of economics. Some large university libraries with historically important groups of economists—Harvard, Columbia (Wesley Mitchell, John Bates Clark), Chicago (Knight, Simons, Coase, and Stigler) and Yale (Irving Fisher, and the Cowles Commission Papers)—also have significant archival holdings.

To our knowledge, the largest archive of 20th century materials is located at Duke University. Several years ago the history of economics group at Duke<sup>4</sup>

began to assemble and collect various archival materials in what is now called *The Economists' Papers Project*. This part of the Duke University Special Collections Library consists of the professional papers of a number of distinguished 20th century economists. In a number of cases we have attempted to enhance the collection by obtaining the papers of several individuals whose work could be considered linked together. For example, we have a set of papers of "Chicago labor economists" (H. Gregg Lewis, Al Rees, Zvi Griliches), and a set of papers of "game theorists" (Oskar Morgenstern, Martin Shubik). Our desire has been to build a single archival site of sufficiently rich 20th century American materials to permit real economies of scale for historians using the collection. The archive now contains the collections of the papers of 29 economists, with several other collections committed for deposit at Duke.<sup>5</sup>

As with all archives, the size of Duke's collections vary: The Douglass C. North Papers at present consist of less than one standard file box of material, while The Don Patinkin Papers fill eighty. The contents are similarly variable. Collections may consist of correspondence, lecture notes (taken while a student, or produced as a teacher), data, drafts and manuscripts of major

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W. (Bob) Coats and Paul Sturges (Sturges 1975) who identified not only the sites of economists' papers throughout the United Kingdom but also some of the contents of those collections so that historians could better understand the location of the historical resources which were available there. In Italy, see the references in Roncaglia (1997). In North America we have no similar finding-resource, aside from the well-indexed National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. Consequently, it has been the concern of the History of Economics Society, specifically through its electronic mailing list HES-List, to identify archival collections and to add collections to the on-line index at the HES website.

<sup>4</sup>Consisting at that time of Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, A. W. "Bob" Coats, Neil B. DeMarchi,

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and E. Roy Weintraub, together with the Director of Duke University Special Collections Library, Robert L. Byrd.

<sup>5</sup>At present, the papers are those of Kenneth J. Arrow, William J. Baumol, Arthur I. Bloomfield, Martin Bronfenbrenner, Robert Clower, Launchlin Currie, Evsey D. Domar, Frank W. Fetter, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, W. M. Gorman, Zvi Griliches, Earl Hamilton, Calvin B. Hoover, Homer Jones, Axel Leijonhufvud, H. Gregg Lewis, Carl Menger, Karl Menger, Lloyd Metzler, Oskar Morgenstern, Douglass C. North, Don Patinkin, Mark Perlman, Albert Rees, Martin Shubik, Vernon L. Smith, Joseph J. Spengler, Wolfgang Stolper, and Sidney Weintraub.

works, and sometimes more sensitive materials such as referees' reports and tenure evaluations. Furthermore, although they are often referred to as "papers," collections need not necessarily take that form: they may also consist of videotapes, audio tapes, and photographs.

The correspondence contained in the collections offers a rich source of information on the history of economics. In Don Patinkin's large collection, fully 44 boxes contain correspondence, written and received, from every year of his professional career and with almost every colleague. Patinkin exchanged long letters with John Hicks in the mid-1950s on the economics of John Maynard Keynes and with Milton Friedman in the late 1970s on the monetary theory of the "Chicago school." From these and other letters one can revisit the development of macroeconomic thought after Keynes from the personal perspective of the major participants. In addition, as someone who never shied away from debate, Patinkin engaged in extensive correspondence with economists and non-economists on issues such as what constitutes valid methodological practices.

One may also learn much about the training and socialization of young economists from these sources. The Patinkin Papers, for example, contain student papers he wrote for Frank Knight at Chicago, and from the comments on the papers we can learn how Knight went about "producing" an economist. The H. Gregg Lewis Papers likewise show how student writings were corrected and evaluated, and the arguments of the graduate students made to conform to "the Chicago View."

Beyond direct insights into an economist's research, the correspondence in the collections allows a glimpse into all

the professional activities of economists, including administrative responsibilities, consulting, editorial board involvements, and political activism, to name but a few. By painting a picture of life within the community of economists, such correspondence can help researchers to better understand the development of economic thought, the public and private motives of individuals, and the process of interaction within and across intellectual communities. For example, the Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen Papers contain letters pertaining to his role as Associate Editor of *Econometrica* (Gayer 1997), while The Mark Perlman Papers contain, in addition to a remarkably wide-ranging correspondence, material connected to his role as founding editor of the *Journal of Economic Literature*.

The Kenneth J. Arrow Papers document the wide sweep of an economist's activities. For example, they include one set of correspondence pertaining to his political involvement. Through these letters one learns of the economics lecture Arrow gave to Senator Al Gore, as well as his active involvement with arms control, Middle East peace, and human rights organizations. The correspondence and other documents also include matters relating to consulting work, teaching, university committees, and activities for the American Economic Association. While not directly related to his economics research, this correspondence give a valuable look at the economist as activist, teacher, and senior statesman of the profession.

Each collection is a potentially rich mine of information, allowing the researcher with sufficient patience to reconstruct opinions and ideas which were unpublished due to lack of time, apparent lack of popular interest, or confidentiality. For example, hidden within the Patinkin Papers is a scathing

negative assessment of Keynes by Frank Knight.<sup>6</sup> Many collections contain such frank (and sometimes personal) assessments of colleagues. However, the obvious sensitivity of such materials may cause its donor or the controlling library to restrict their availability.

Also buried within some economists' papers are echoes of the classroom lectures we wish we could have attended. Don Patinkin's papers contain dozens of examples: notebooks he kept during his student years at Chicago in the mid-1940s for courses taught by Frank Knight, Lloyd Mints, Henry Simons, Jacob Viner, and Oscar Lange; syllabi, lecture notes, and course packs for his courses on monetary theory (and its history) from throughout his career at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and copies of lecture notes from Cambridge in the 1930s, taken by Lorie Tarshis, Robert Bryce, and Walter Salant which he used as the "raw materials" for his own historical research. The Kenneth Arrow papers similarly contain the notes he took as an undergraduate at City College of New York and as a graduate student at Columbia University; the latter include his notes for Harold Hotelling's course on Mathematical Economics (Arrow's first class in economics).

Another type of material found in the collections are unpublished reports and drafts of books and papers. For example, the Arrow papers contain a number of unpublished reports for the National Research Council on global climate change, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association on contingent valuation, and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research on economic growth. The Martin Shubik Papers contain drafts of his *Game Theory* in the

Social Sciences, a project originally begun with Lloyd Shapley. The Earl Hamilton and Zvi Griliches Papers contain large data sets that may be of interest to economic historians as well as historians of economic thought. Such data can provide the opportunity to test new hypotheses or use new estimation techniques and to compare the results to those obtained in the original research. The Oskar Morgenstern Papers contain a diary he kept nearly continuously from his student days until his death, and record the process of collaboration with John von Neumann, as well as his own political shifts in his Vienna days. They also provide a fascinating glimpse of his remarkable friendship with Kurt Gödel in Princeton. The Karl Menger papers are a treasure trove of material on the life of the mathematical community in Central Europe in the interwar years, and the attempts to link Austrian economics and mathematics in the *Mengerkreis* (and related Vienna Circle) of the pre-Anschluss period. Both the Menger and Morgenstern Papers were heavily utilized in this journal for Leonard (1995).

A final type of material used increasingly by trained historians and found in small quantities in the Duke papers is oral history—audiotapes, videotapes, or transcripts of memoirs or interviews. Particularly valuable are interviews with economists, which give an opportunity to ask questions that may not be addressed in formal writings or even memoirs. The Arrow papers, for example, contain his 1985 Tanner Lecture and an interview with Arrow by George Feiwel, and the Patinkin papers contain a 1972 interview with Paul Samuelson, all on audiotape. Earlene Craver (1986), Robert Leonard (1995), E. Roy Weintraub and Philip Mirowski (1994), and Daniel Hammond (1996) have successfully used interviews to record

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Frank Knight to Jacob Viner, 6 August 1940. We thank Ross Emmett for bringing this document to our attention.

the remembrances of prominent economists.

Most of the preceding discussion has emphasized the value of the collections in professional scholarly research. We wish to stress, though, that the teaching we seek to do to students can itself be modified, and improved, by the use of these records. What better way to describe the connection of economics to macroeconomic policy than to explore, in the papers of a very well known economist, the advice that the economist gave, and the response of a particular policy maker, interchanges often found in the archival records? Using these materials teachers can show students that what they learn can really matter, and to show the mechanisms by which "mattering" can occur. Students who use these records in their classes come away with a greater appreciation of economics and the work of economists. Under a grant Duke University has received from the Ford Foundation, several of us have been experimenting with the use of these records in our teaching of different courses in economics. We have been impressed at the connection students have been able to make between what they are learning in their books and what they have been able to find and use in the records of such engaged economists as Don Patinkin and Sidney Weintraub.

### 3. *What to Save and How to Go About It*

Aside from being researchers interested in archival material, economists are potential suppliers of their collected papers to repositories. The previous discussion on the contents of existing collections should serve as an example of the usefulness of the assorted contents of economists' papers. Papers need not contain information on "famous" re-

search articles or persons, nor must they be old, in order to be of use to present-day or future historians of economics. It is possible they need not even be in the material forms considered in the previous section: the increasing use of telephone and electronic communication will surely change the nature of archival records, increasingly admitting computer files and electronic mail.<sup>7</sup> Even a skeptic of the research value of archival material should still be aware that there are those whose fields of research involve use of such material: archives form much of the raw data available to historians.

If you are considering preserving your papers, the first step in the process is to contact a repository. A good starting place is your college or university archives, campus special collections library, state historical society, or state archives. The Society of American Archivists (phone: 312-922-0140) can also give suggestions on whom to contact. For preservation purposes, it is generally best not to specially organize your papers or discard material before meeting with a member of the repository staff. Depending on their personnel and space constraints, a repository may accept all, some, or none of your papers. Nonetheless, they will welcome the opportunity to evaluate your papers and, if necessary, suggest a more appropriate repository for your material. Note also that if a repository does accept your papers, it may prefer to keep them in their present organization, as organization schemes themselves can sometimes

<sup>7</sup> We expect that these new forms of archival materials will also aid in their dissemination: very limited selections from archives are already accessible electronically via the World Wide Web, a method of publication facilitated dramatically if the archival documents are already in electronic form. See the new site <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/economists/>.



give clues about the way researchers think about their materials.

Generally, donors are asked to sign an agreement that gives property of the papers to the repository; rarely do repositories accept collections on loan or deposit. Before signing such an agreement, you should become familiar with the repository's policies on availability and publication of the papers. Most repositories are willing to attempt to address any concerns you may have, such as a desire to restrict part of the collection to protect the privacy of others. However, some may be more accessible to future scholars than others, or may have related collections that would match your work well. Researchers find the collections useful depending not only on their contents, but the restrictions put upon their use by the archivists. Restrictions may include prohibiting or making excessively costly the use of a photocopier, or denying access to a particular box or file folder. This is done particularly in the case of referees' reports, tenure evaluations, etc., or simply at the request of the donor.

While you may find it easier to throw

away your papers or to not consider what to do with them, keep in mind that it is these documents that are of use to the historian. The ability to write rich histories depends upon the survival of correspondence, drafts, manuscripts, publications, photographs, etc., in order to construct useful accounts of the past.

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