
As documents of complicated socio-cultural standing, women’s diaries frustrate traditional approaches to archival description and speak to the subjective nature of the practice. This exploratory study traces the scholarly life of the Southern Historical Collection’s Sarah Lois Wadley diary in relation to its finding aid and to significant events in its archival existence. It follows the citation of 197 of the diary’s dated entries across 37 historical books and statistically analyzes the usage of described entries versus the usage of non-described entries in order to explore the connection between archival description and scholarly interpretation. In addition to arriving at correlations that demonstrate digitization and encoding’s positive effect on access, the study discusses the intersection between historical and archival judgment and also the potential for descriptive practices to embrace collaboration.

Headings:

- Cataloging of archival materials
- Citation of archival materials
- Content analysis (Communication)
- Digitization of archival materials
- Finding aids (Library resources)
- Information-seeking behavior
THE SCHOLARLY LIFE AND THE ARCHIVAL LIFE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE SARAH LOIS WADLEY DIARY AND ITS USAGE BY HISTORIANS

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Born to a family wedded to the emerging railroad industry, Sarah Lois Wadley seemingly enjoyed a life of privilege during the Civil War, so much so that some scholars have labeled her a “Confederate belle” and a “Confederate daughter.” She certainly did experience the benefits of being white and wealthy as her father rose to a prestigious position and her family took trips from their home in Monroe, Louisiana, all over the South and as far north as New Hampshire. An “articulate and young woman,” as the Southern Historical Collection (SHC) describes her, she read Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Raleigh Scott. She received an education in arithmetic, Latin, and piano, and still the will to advance speaks through her diary: “…I feel more than ever before my great ignorance in all that pertains to the knowledge of a student… Ah! I have much, very much to learn” (October 18, 1860).

Wadley kept her diary from 1859 to 1865 and intermittently thereafter until 1886. Born in November of 1844, Wadley had aged from 14 to 20 between the entries dated 1859 and 1865. As she experienced changes in her own personal development, the United States itself saw the uprooting of the racial suppression on which much of the South’s economy had been founded, the rise and fall of the Confederacy, the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, and the unraveling of a hierarchy based on the ownership of property—including slaves. There is the tendency to interpret Wadley
as a stereotypical “Confederate belle” and as a cheerleader for General Robert E. Lee, but Wadley, who herself was made a refugee on account of the war, did not observe any of its battles without conflict.

Just before Lincoln’s election, she speaks in favor of a war, regarding the abolitionists as ex-patriots who “have sowed the seeds of dissension and insurrection among us” and who “shout Freedom and Union, but… would take away our freedom and give it to the negro…” (October 26, 1860). Several months later, her anguish becomes apparent as she prophetically contemplates the full gravity of pitting brother against brother and the inevitable decline of her family’s nobility:

This is one of my dark days, one in which I feel the burden of humanity pressing too heavily to be borne; the future looks threatening, the present is clouded with doubt, and uncertainty; our country is in turmoil and danger, and our family seems like a ship floating upon a troubled sea, with no particular destination, no particular interest in any thing, only to keep afloat. I know I am doing wrong, I know I am murmuring when I should be thanking God for his blessings to us, for are we not fed and clothed and sheltered safely, are not we an unbroken household band, Mother, Father brothers and sisters all are here; but oh I am so weak so wicked, I struggle against it but cannot overcome; when when shall I learn to trust Providence, when shall I cease to care about the disappointments of this world. (April 26, 1861)

This “burden of humanity” strikes at the heart of what it means to explore a person’s private reflections during a time of tremendous upheaval in direct spite of the inclination to view that person’s perspective as typical of that time. The diary speaks to the political and cultural climate of the Confederacy, but it also speaks to the emotional experiences of a human being in the process of rationalizing the collapse of her worldview. In reaching the archives, Wadley’s diary becomes the testimony of a private apocalypse. It becomes a thing of public scrutiny, a document from decades past that tells the story of a Confederate, a slaveholder, a Christian, a member of the elite class, a
Caucasian, a woman, but—most of all—a human being who inhabited multiple identities and who looked to the future helplessly as a woman at the mercy of forces beyond her control:

This book holds within it's covers the record of our triumphs, of my hopes, my faith, my love for my country, alas, that it should close thus. I have looked forward to a life of poverty, of suffering perhaps and sorrow, but never, never to this. It seems too hard to bear. I will try to be resigned, I will try to look beyond the blindness of Earthly passion to that calm, clear, mighty Power which rules the Universe in wisdom and Love; and I know that I shall hereafter feel that he continually rules, but now, Oh God, help me. (May 13, 1865)

The SHC received the diary and its five volumes in 1947. Not much documentation exists behind the justification of the current finding aid with its granular description of specific entries. Beyond hashing out an agreement with the donor and making arrangements for typed transcriptions, the initial authority records contain only scrawls that correct a preliminary description of the date ranges covered by each volume. Among those records is a suggestion by an SHC staff member in 1969 that the “diary cries for adequate indexing and description,” to be justified by Wadley’s articulate observations and wide travels. The staff member goes further to suggest subject indexes and references the SHC’s Guide to Manuscripts, which in its 1970 version presented Wadley’s diary as follows: “Articulate and extensive diary of the thoughts, experiences, family life, and travels of the daughter of a planter near Monroe. The diary is complete from Aug 1859 to Oct 1865, but slight and occasional thereafter. Miss Wadley was a good observer and describer of the family and social milieu. The diary records many visits to New Orleans and Vicksburg, a trip to a GA resort, an antebellum journey by way of St Louis, Chicago, and Niagara Falls to visit relatives in NH, and many shorter trips. During the Civil War she was seldom far from a war zone.”
How, then, the SHC arrived at its 1990 description of the diary when staff first processed the collection remains unclear, and the fact that the description has stayed the same even to the present day makes this question all the more relevant. Before 1990, the discussion centered on the proper terms by which to index the diary, but this does not answer the question as to why the finding aid highlights certain entries over others or why it presents certain entries as pertaining to specific ideas when the scholarly interpretations remain divided.

In 2000, the transcription of the diary became digitized as part of the Documenting the American South Project. In 2008, a third party encoded the finding aid. With these developments, the diary and its description fully entered the digital world. In 150 years, a diary penned by a nineteenth-century teenager has broken the bounds of its physicality, has been rendered an abstract representation of a woman’s experience during the Civil War according to its archival description, and now exists as an easily retrievable source by any user with an internet connection. These developments represent more than just a trajectory at the whims of technology. They represent points of maturation in a lifespan that will directly affect how the diary’s existence plays out in the historical, context-driven scholarship that necessarily goes beyond the archival description.

This paper therefore frames the story of the historical use of Wadley’s diary as a dialogue, whether coincidental or deliberate, between its scholarly life and its archival life. It traces specific entries throughout the scholarship and compares their usage to how they are described and presents correlations resulting from significant events in the diary’s archival history. This study proposes that archival materials do have a life, one
which includes the perspectives of both archivists and scholars, both inside and outside the archives, and which creates an observable, measureable path.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on finding aids focuses primarily on three areas: usability, information seeking behavior, and standardization. Only recently has there been a change in conceptualizing finding aids as social documents and in understanding the dynamic between researcher and archivist. Even in this thread there exist some notions of antagonism—that archives are ultimately institutions of power that manipulate memory. Archives have traditionally lagged behind libraries in understanding their user base, and the variety of ways in which users now access materials compromises the finding aid’s place as the one and only retrieval tool and, by extension, archival description’s place as the initial threshold of interaction between the researcher and the materials.

Many large surveys have targeted the techniques that historians employ to find information and what their preferences are (Tibbo, 2003; Anderson, 2004; Duff, Craig, and Cherry, 2004). The goal of these surveys has been expansive in order to account for the entire climate of information-seeking behavior, from the user’s preferred method of contacting the archive to the media they utilize the most in their research. For the purposes of this study, which has its focus on description, their findings are largely irrelevant, but they do represent a deliberate fascination with historians over other user bases, even while genealogists have been the most prominent users of archives. While
many studies have included genealogists and different levels of students, Duff, Craig, and Cherry (2004) argue that historians “are clients whose work has effects that far outweigh their numbers” (p. 52). Historians produce a measurable amount of scholarship based on their interactions with archival materials, which can be traced back to the archives through citations. This scholarship is, furthermore, published and available. While not all users publish their findings or even approach archival materials with the intent of publishing anything, the discussion on the significance of historians informed this paper not to the exclusion of other types of users but to the inclusion of a dynamic that would more concretely capture the dialogue between historical interpretation and archival description.

Several threads of the literature on historians’ information-seeking behavior come into play here, given that the study itself required the tracking down of scholarly works based on following citations. This behavior—the chasing of footnotes from one source to the next—is called chaining (Ellis 1989). The other types of behavior, as described by Ellis, are as follows: starting, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, and extracting. The climate of the historian’s information-seeking behavior rests on a combination of activities, including serendipitous discovery, keeping up to date with similar scholarship, systematically analyzing the source in question, and so on. In the context of archives, Rhee (2011) uses this framework to contrast historical research with social science research in response to the information seeking behavior model proposed by Meho and Tibbo (2003). Rhee found that historians rely more on chaining, trust the efficacy of serendipity, and consider access issues to be a problem that compromises the quality of their research. To solve the problem of access, Rhee identifies the need for description to
change in order to meet the needs of historians, particularly regarding the matter of subject classification. In regards to monitoring, historians rely on archivists to be knowledgeable about research trends and deliberately cultivate social networks throughout the research process.

Johnson and Duff (2005) speak to this dynamic in their study of the social relationship between archivists and historians. Notably, the study privileges the role of the archivist and the so-called “social capital” that he or she enjoys as a result of being familiar with the collections. It does not discuss how researchers may rely on one another to direct their search. The authors identify the types of knowledge that historians value in their archivists and draw on diaries and interviews with participants. While the spirit of the study is forward-thinking, the results reveal participants’ anxiety that having a poor relationship with the archivist might affect the quality of their research. This anxiety reinforces the image of the archivist as a gatekeeper, which Duff and Johnson explicitly reference and which has antagonistic connotations. The authors’ conclusion suggests that this social interaction is dwindling as a result of the impersonal way in which researchers now have remote access to finding aids and to digitized materials. In addition to the retiring of archival professionals, they predict that the divide between old historians, who utilize a more traditional face-to-face approach while researching, and young historians, who may be more accustomed to online finding aids, will affect the social relationship between archivist and researcher. This idea raises the question as to what extent such a relationship might influence the collaborative evolution of archival description and to what extent digitization might affect the need for the historian to even consult the archival description. Would a historian discuss his or her research with an
archivist and describe his or her findings if that relationship does not exist? Possibly no, yet recent literature that treats finding aids as a genre of their own and that investigates them as social documents may illuminate the social and cultural complexity behind archival description.

From this perspective, Yakel (2003) presents a picture of finding aids as being dynamic documents that receive input from more authors than just the archivist. Appearing first as mere inventory lists, finding aids have now become a context-driven genre with sometimes copious biographical and historical notes. Yakel explains two hypotheses for this development. First, the trend falls in line with provenance requirements. Second, it may have been fueled by the initiative to represent voices that have been traditionally marginalized. With the introduction of online encoding standards, the authorship of finding aids has become significant. Many finding aids list the chain of authorship from one archivist to the next, while some only generically describe the authors under the umbrella term “staff.” In a time in which archival description is considered, in Yakel’s words, “neither objective nor transparent,” this discussion allows for the possibility to see finding aids as fluid documents that have an evolutionary life cycle and that involve the perspectives of many different parties (p. 25).

On the subject of what finding aids actually accomplish, MacNeil (2012) offers her own insight:

Approaching archival description as a rhetorical genre creates opportunities for examining the social actions that finding aids participate in and/or accomplish and the ways in which these descriptive texts work to construct a community of writers and readers. It could be argued, for example, that archival finding aids are vehicles for carrying out a range of explicit and implicit social actions, among them: making archival holdings visible and accessible, confirming the cohesion and authenticity of a body of records, validating the authority of archivists and archival institutions to preserve cultural resources and make them available for
use, and enshrining particular perspectives on the notions of “community,” “identity,” and “cultural heritage.” (p. 487-488)

Finding aids, therefore, bear certain social responsibilities. Now that finding aids have gone online, their social powers have expanded to include a vast community of invisible users who span the entire globe. Moreover, this expansion of the user base through technology, as Hedstrom (2002) argues, obligates archivists to investigate the rhetorical power of finding aids: “The emergence of computer interfaces as an increasingly common mode of user interaction with archives demands that archivists confront the interpretative nature of their work and exploit opportunities to place themselves visibly in the interfaces they construct” (p. 21). In other words, users should pay attention to the man behind the curtain. Even while the archivist maintains an adherence to professional standards, the finding aid still communicates the archivist’s subjectivity. This line of argument takes up the postmodernist tradition of examining the archive as an institution of power that does not exist in a cultural void. Even by omission, archives inhabit a larger power structure in which some voices may be highlighted and others marginalized (Carter, 2006). Here, again, an antagonistic image of the archivist emerges, one that emphasizes a confrontational posture rather than a collaborative one.

Schwartz and Cook (2002) describe this image best:

…archives are established by the powerful to protect or enhance their position in society. Through archives, the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalized. And archivists are an integral part of this story-telling. In the design of record-keeping systems, in the appraisal and selection of a tiny fragment of all possible records to enter the archive, in approaches to subsequent and ever-changing description and preservation of the archive, and in its patterns of communication and use, archivists continually reshape, reinterpret, and reinvent the archive. This represents enormous power over memory and identity, over the
fundamental ways in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been, where it has come from, and where it is going. Archives, then, are not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed. (p. 1)

The substance of this argument is true and, in today’s climate, is generally acknowledged as being so, but the archivist’s exercise of power may not be so deliberate. In addition to being unable to predict what will interest historians or how they will interpret materials, the archivist may not even be fully aware of what exists in his or her own collections, especially as processing trends take on the call to make materials as available as possible (Greene & Meissner, 2005). This view of the archives as a fluid institution informs the investigation of description as a malleable practice that is shaped by social functions. In their deconstruction of archival description, Duff and Harris (2002) conclude that the practice is fundamentally biased and has more in common with storytelling than objective recording. While the argument may at first glance suggest malevolence on the part of the archivist, it mainly upsets traditional, Jenkinsoinan ideals and paints a more complex picture of the archival process that recognizes the unsolvable dilemmas of the profession.

One notable example of the almost accidental quality of archival research involves Heather Williams’ Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Lost Family in Slavery (2012). In the introduction of her book, she discusses how, while researching about African American education during the time of slavery, she came across newspaper advertisements placed by African Americans seeking information on estranged loved ones. Advertisements, by their nature, can be easily overlooked, and this example illustrates the inventive ways in which researchers may utilize materials.
Duff and Johnson (2002) confirm historians’ nonlinear information-seeking behaviors, and their description of how researchers interact with finding aids is telling. Most participants in the study started their search with the print version of the finding aid, as they preferred to flip physically through the document in order to get a sense of the whole collection. In cases where biographical and historical information was included in the archival description, the finding aid would itself become a secondary source for the historian’s research. One participant even treated the finding aid as an object of textual analysis and derived a list of keywords from it to help direct the search for information. However, 2002 represents a much different context than today’s time in which finding aids, while communicating contextual information and allowing for retrieval, may be entirely irrelevant to the historian who can simply go straight to the digitized transcription of a diary.

The choice of focusing on diaries was inspired by Beattie’s 2009 article in which she provides an in-depth look on diaries written by women. Her article contains two primary elements. First, as Beattie’s central thesis reads, “[t]raditional archival description forms a very narrow basis for understanding these records because of the myriad forms diaries can take and roles they can play in their creators’ lives” (p. 82). For instance, it would not make sense to view a diary as a typical transactional record with a life cycle. Diaries communicate the author’s most intimate thoughts, and much of archival description, which may supply only a generic list of contents, falls short of providing a broader, more complex approach to provenance. Second, her study importantly singles out a specific category of creators—namely, women. By focusing on women, a group which occupies its own peculiar place in history and culture, Beattie
brings up questions that extend beyond archives, much like MacNeil or Yakel’s way of viewing the archives in context with society and culture at large. The author’s intention for writing her diary, in particular, represents a facet that archivists often overlook. Having this knowledge entails an intimacy that may escape the archivist who merely creates finding aids as a means of providing a surrogate inventory of the collection for the purposes of retrieval. Instead, what Beattie argues for blurs the line between blunt description and insightful interpretation, between mere inventory list and worthwhile historical notation.

Much of this perspective is echoed in historical literature on the subject of diaries as primary sources. Hammerle (2008) discusses what makes diaries peculiar objects of study. Diaries, while ostensibly representing the unfiltered and immediate consciousness of the author, carry a reflective dimension that resembles self-observation as the author frames his or her thoughts. This dimension is tempered by the inherent contradiction of outwardly communicating what the author may intend to be private. This contradiction becomes more apparent when an archives acquires the diary and offers it up for public consumption. Stressing the gendered, sociological nature of the discussion, Hammerle recognizes this complexity and offers a perspective on the genre that is ultimately similar to Beattie’s: “The diary should not be conceived of as exclusively private, even when it contains for example the everyday writings of a young girl on her family, her school, her prayers, and her dreams. Rather, this writing, [has], like any diary-writing, significance for gender politics, and ultimately social implications, and could ultimately… be published as an expression of such” (p. 146). As she concludes, diaries are a meshing of past, present, and future, and each page must be seen in its own peculiar context.
For these reasons, diaries written by women make an ideal focus for an exploratory study into how historical scholarship and archival description relate to one another. No one single diary is similar to another, and each may be so internally heterogeneous in terms of its information that the genre lends itself well to new discoveries and new interpretations. Given the fluidity of finding aids, this complexity may set the stage for historical judgment and archival judgment to intermingle as historians and archivists, by intention or by coincidence, gravitate toward similar themes and items.

III. METHODOLOGY

Informed by White and Marsh (2006) and Babbie (2009), the study employed a content analysis methodology with its framework being based on the reference of specific diary entries in the Sarah Lois Wadley Papers finding aid and in historical scholarship. These entries were considered to be observable points of intersection between archival description and historical interpretation. In focusing on them, the goal was to draw comparisons on how they were highlighted in the finding aid versus how they were referenced in research. A second goal was to investigate trends throughout the scholarly life of the diary in relation to its archival life, from the time it was first processed, digitized, and then encoded.

This methodology has been used to examine a large variety of archival issues, such as Encoded Archival Description (Kim, 2004), subject access to finding aids (Czeck, 1998), and Web 2.0 functionality (Yakel, 2006; Samouelian, 2009). In the
discipline of history, the method is also not uncommon and has proven useful in the exploration of particular themes in historiography, such as the representation of women in high school history textbooks (Gordy, Hogan, and Pritchard, 2004).

Babbie defines content analysis as the study of recorded human communications through the careful classification of operationally defined topics. For this project, the units of analyses were primarily the referenced entries themselves and the archival description that surrounded them. The study counted all those entries that the scholarly works referenced, classified them based on whether they received explicit and traceable description in the finding aid, and matched those entries to their usage with exactness in mind. The study utilized t-tests to determine the statistical significance of the relation between the data collected on described entries and non-described entries. As such, it relied on the generally accepted p-value of 0.05 as being the threshold of statistical significance.

First, a search was performed of the SHC’s holdings of women’s diaries. The Wadley diary was selected purposively in light of Beattie’s discussion on the difficulty of describing women’s diaries. Standing apart from other diaries in the SHC, the Wadley diary remains exceptional in the way that the finding aid describes specific entries on a granular level. Other Civil War-era women’s diaries that are held at the SHC, such as the Emma LeConte diary, are described only broadly as reflecting on the Civil War and as detailing daily events. Still others, such as the Mary Susan Kerr diaries, are described in great detail but do not align specific insights and events with specific entries. Without being able to use specific entries as a basis by which to approach the scholarly books, the content analysis would have far exceeded the scope of this study.
Data collection relied on the identification of relevant sources through the GoogleBooks search engine. Search terms included many variations of Sarah Lois Wadley’s name—*Wadley, Sarah L. Wadley, Sarah Wadley, Sarah Lois Wadley*—in order to account for the variety of ways in which scholars cited the diary in their footnotes and bibliographies. The search also concerned itself only with books that referenced the diary from the SHC, as it appears that typescripts may be held by other institutions. Works of fiction whose introductions reference the diary were excluded. Collections of essays in which one or more essay reference the diary, on the other hand, were included. The results provided the study with a data pool to be extracted from 37 works of historical research spanning nearly 30 years of publication from 1984 to 2012.

The study counted all instances in which the books reference the diary’s entries. The count included instances in which Wadley was named or unnamed, quoted or unquoted, and *see also* notes. Thus, the study compiled an extensive list of how many times each entry was referenced and which books reference which entries. For those scholars who cited the diary as pages in a typescript and not as dated entries, the quotes they used were compared with the text of the digitized version of the diary, and their corresponding dates were identified and recorded. Very few remained unidentifiable. The resulting data set contained 197 different entries that were referenced 347 seven times, only 6 of which could not be tied to a specific date.

The finding aid of the collection itself received similar treatment. The study recorded the dated entries that received attention in the archival description. Those entries that fell within a range of dates were also counted as being described in the finding aid. For instance, the finding aid collectively describes a several-day span of
entries as pertaining to rumors of war and the First Battle of Manassas. All entries dated within that range were included in the total count, but only a subsection of the entries found in the finding aid were designated as being directly traceable throughout the scholarship.

Traceability was determined in the following way. First, the study noted those entries that contained mention of specific events, people, and places or that quoted Wadley herself. These were considered, at their face value, the most easily traceable entries. Second, the study considered those entries that the finding aid describes only broadly. In this regard, a case-by-case judgment was required. Those entries whose descriptions were too broad or that did not isolate specific days were not included. Additionally, even if an entry received specific description in the finding aid, only those entries that were referenced within the body of the scholarship counted, as see also notes present a far too nebulous point of study. An entry, for example, that was highlighted as “describing life after the Civil War” was considered to be much too broad. Therefore, specificity guided the criteria. Of all the 197 entries that were referenced in the scholarly works, 48 received attention in the finding aid and were referenced 98 times. Of those 48, 30 met the standards for traceability. The remaining 20 are not included in the comparison between the archival description and the scholarly interpretation.

The 30 entries were matched to their corresponding descriptions, and each was compared to the instances in which they were referenced. This comparison was based on the exact matching of specific quotes, names, places, and events that are described in the finding aid and used in the scholarship. If the finding aid described the entry by quoting it directly or by tying it to a specific event, the study searched for the same quote or the
same event in the scholarship. For example, if the finding aid highlighted the quote as relating to the fall of Vicksburg, it was expected that the word *Vicksburg* should appear in text of the scholarly work at the point of the particular entry’s reference.

In light of subject classification and access points, the study tested the assumption that books that cite the diary should also share the same access points as the diary’s finding aid by comparing their subject headings. Only exact matches counted. The study then examined the results in relation to the average number of subject headings that each book received versus the number of subject headings that the finding aid received in order to comment on the difference between archival and bibliographic cataloging.

As the study was also concerned with the lifespan of the diary, it was necessary to frame the data in relation to time. Consulting control files and past iterations of the finding aid revealed that the diary’s description has not changed since it was first processed. Three years were identified as reasonable candidates for having affected change in the diary’s use:

1990: The year in which the diary was first processed.
2000: The year in which the diary’s transcript was digitized as part of UNC’s Documenting the American South project.
2008: The year in which the finding aid was encoded.

With 1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2008, and 2008 to 2012 (2012 being the most recent publication date of the books in question) representing distinct phases in the diary’s lifespan, these date ranges served as centers around which to statistically analyze the usage of described entries versus the usage of non-described entries and to compare the changes in this usage proportionally from one phase to another.
IV. RESULTS

Described Entries vs. Non-described Entries

Figure 1 demonstrates the total reference instances of all the entries that were mentioned in the scholarship from the earliest dated entry to the last.

From August 28, 1859, to January 1, 1866, authors referenced 197 entries an average of 1.73 times. Peaking at 8, the entry dated March 2, 1862, was the most referenced entry in the entire diary. With a standard deviation of 0.09, the range of data points did not vary greatly from the mean. Therefore, outliers are not significant in this
analysis. Analyzing the number of instances by the year in which they were dated illuminates the part of history and Wadley’s life that most interested scholars.

![Fig. 2. References by Year of Entry](image)

Diary entries that fell within the year 1861 received the most attention from scholars with a marginal lead over the year 1864 (See Figure 2). In contrast, the years 1859 and 1866 received very little attention, and those years after 1866 received none, despite the selection of books not being limited to those with the Civil War subject heading. While the number of entries dated before and after the Civil War are comparatively fewer than those dated during the war, at least four entries dated after 1866 were explicitly highlighted in the finding aid but were neglected by historians.

Comparing described and non-described entries reveals that scholars did, on average, reference described entries more frequently. Referenced 98 times, the 48 described entries appeared in the scholarly works an average of 2.04 times, or 0.41 higher
than the average across the board. In comparison, those 149 entries not mentioned in the finding aid were referenced a total of 241 times for an average of 1.63.

Conducting a t-test across both categories resulted in a $p$-value of 0.06. If the generally accepted measure of statistical significance is 0.05, then the data do not suggest any statistical significance in the likelihood that historians cited the described entries more than the non-described entries. At best, the results illustrate an interesting correlation, not a causal link.

*Described Entries vs. Their Usage by Historians*

Of the 48 described entries, 30 met the criteria for matching. After eliminating *see also* instances, these 30 were referenced a total of 57 times and represent possible points of interaction or coincidental matching between the archival description and the scholarship.

<table>
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<th>Entries</th>
<th>Times Referenced</th>
<th>Archival Description</th>
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<td>4/6/60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Birth of brother</td>
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<td>10/26/60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Election: &quot;perfidious abolitionists&quot;</td>
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<td>12/4/60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presbyterian clergyman Benjamin Morgan Palmer's Thanksgiving sermon at New Orleans, which advocated secession</td>
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<td>1/4/61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family life and socializing in Amite, Louisiana</td>
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<td>Appointment of father as superintendent of railroad; attack on Fort Sumter</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Description of house and furniture</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Military sewing society</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/15/61</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wadley grimly contemplating &quot;four long years of war&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/21/61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Incident involving foreigners in Confederate Army in which a civilian's house burned down</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conscription; concern for brother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12/63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fall of Vicksburg</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2/63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Meeting in Marshall, Texas, in which General E. Kirby Smith was given broad powers to control the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>People losing patriotism</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/18/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Confidence in General Robert E. Lee</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fall of Atlanta and concern for General John Bell Hood's Army</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/24/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mention of a friend having tea with General Prince Polignac</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Distaste for the ideas of reconstruction</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/20/64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Confidence that Sherman would be defeated; &quot;How I wish I were a man and in Georgia...&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/14/65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brother's unit skirmish with bandits; Hood's &quot;shameful defeat&quot; near Nashville and General Joseph Hardee's evacuation of Savannah</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3/65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fall of Fort Fisher and its refusal to surrender</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rumors of Lee's surrender</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26/65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lincoln's assassination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1/65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rumors that only Lee's rearguard had surrendered and that Sherman had lost to Johnston</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/13/65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Long lamentation over the defeat of the Confederacy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/30/66</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Father being made head of the Georgia central railroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 3. Description and Interpretation Matching**

Figure 3 shows that, of the 57 times that the entries were referenced to a traceable degree of specificity, only 28 instances corresponded to the archival description. At 49%, this study cannot argue a positive or a negative correlation between the archival description and the scholarly interpretation. It also cannot argue that the archival description had an effective, causal association with how scholars used the entries. Nevertheless, the results do present some discrepancies between the historical treatment of the entries and the judgment behind the archivist’s reason for describing them. For
example, the entry dated July 14, 1861, is described in the finding aid as pertaining to Wadley’s membership in a military sewing society. Of the seven times it was referenced, only three instances match this description. The remaining four instances all pertain to the same topic—specifically, Wadley’s observations of slaves receiving communion. Why, then, should the entry be highlighted as pertaining to Wadley’s involvement with a military sewing society and not the more common interpretation? No historian will rely solely on the archival description, but these points do represent clashes between the judgment of the historian and the archivist.

_Scholarly Life vs. Archival Life_

The next step of the analysis categorized the use of the diary by three distinct time spans in order to determine how digitization and encoding affected the usage of described and non-described entries. These time spans include 1990 to 1999 when the collection was first processed but not yet digitized, 2000 to 2007 when the diary was digitized but the finding aid had not yet been encoded, and 2008 to 2012 when the finding aid was finally encoded.
Figure 4 concerns entries that were referenced among six scholarly works published from 1990 to 1999. The data set here is much smaller than those found in the figures that cover later periods in the diary’s archival life. With all 12 entries being referenced an average 1.25 times, the described entries fared slightly higher than non-described entries with an average of 1.50 and 1.00 respectively. This difference is only due to a single entry and bears no real statistical significance. The results do, however, illustrate the scarcity of data during a time in which the diary and its finding aid essentially had no digital existence. From 2000 to 2007, when the diary experienced its first several years of digitized existence, the data look much different.
Fig. 5. Reference of Non-Described Entries, 2000-2007

Fig. 6. Reference of Described Entries, 2000-2007
In the 11 works that were published from 2000 to 2007, 144 entries were referenced an average of 1.54 times (See Figures 5 and 6). The 34 described entries experienced slightly greater usage with an average of 1.71. In comparison, the non-described entries were referenced an average of 1.49 times. While t-test results do not present statistical significance across the average use of described and non-described entries, the size of this data pool does represent a 1,585% increase from the previous time span. Between the described entries and non-described entries, the number of references increased 950% and 2063% respectively. In other words, the non-described entries experienced a much greater proportional increase in their usage than did the described entries between the time that the diary was processed and the time that it was digitized. The works published after the finding aid’s encoding allow for similar correlations.

![Fig. 7. Reference of Non-Described Entries, 2008-2012](image-url)
Published from 2008 to 2012, 14 of the selected books referenced 78 entries 88 times for an average of 1.13 uses per entry (See Figures 7 and 8). The 26 described entries were referenced slightly more than the total average with a value of 1.23. Similar to the other use periods, the 52 non-described entries fell below the total average at 1.08. In this case, the $p$-value resulting from the t-test measured at 0.09, much lower than the other date ranges but still statistically insignificant. More interestingly, the usage of the described entries was proportionally greater for these years than it was from 2000 to 2007. After the finding aid became encoded, the described entries represented 36.37% of the total amount of references, while from 2000 to 2007 they represented only 25.68%. This difference is particularly interesting considering that the 2000 to 2007 range concerned three fewer scholarly works than did the 2008 to 2012 range. While only

**Fig. 8. Reference of Described Entries, 2008-2012**
correlations, the results appear consistent with the expectation that the online presence of collections has a positive effect on access.

Subject Access

On the question of access points, the study found that very few of the scholarly works shared exact subject headings with the collection’s finding aid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding Aid Headings</th>
<th>Number of Matching Scholarly Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confederate States of America--Social conditions.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1807-1870.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroads--Confederate States of America.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Public opinion.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Transportation.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Women.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9. Subject Headings Matches

Figure 9 shows only those subject headings that were shared exactly between the finding aid and the scholarly works. Of these headings, only two present a sizable matching. As a percentage of the total number of works (with five of 37 representing only 13.51%), this matching does not support assumptions that the books and the collection might share access points. This is in part due to the difference between archival and bibliographic cataloging and also the difference between the scope of the diary and the books. Because archival cataloging tends to involve the names of the collection’s creators, many of the finding aid’s personal headings relate to the Wadley
family specifically. The finding aid’s subject headings also went down to a much more granular level than the scholarly works’ subject headings by naming particular Georgia and Louisiana towns. While the diary’s separate digitized version received 11 subject headings, its finding aid contains 28. In contrast, the historical books received an average of 5 subject headings. The subject classification of the scholarship therefore entails the much broader categorization of books that may be several hundred pages long and that may cover a near infinite number of subjects. While scholars such as Rhee may argue for changes in subject classification that take into account how historians use archival materials, the difference between the scopes of archival and bibliographic materials complicate the matter of access.

V. DISCUSSION

Historians, by their trade, are in the business of going beyond the contextual information provided by archivists. This study’s aim was not to suggest a causal link between description and interpretation. Historians employ all manners of strategies in their search for information, and only through interviews could one discuss the extent to which the archival description of the diary actually informed their information retrieval and their interpretations. However, the results do reveal correlations between the changes in the diary’s archival life and the extent of the diary’s use—whether or not historians came upon the entries by consulting the finding aid, chaining the citations in other books, or diving into the diary directly.
As an exploratory project, the study proved to be an experiment in the design of an appropriate methodology. The use of GoogleBooks as a selection tool has its problems, as not every work of scholarship comes in the form of a book. The Web of Science does contain a limited number of citations to the Wadley diary from books published since 2005, but GoogleBooks was favored because its search results are much less limited. Future studies may attempt to filter references they deem insignificant. Of the selected works, nearly half reference the diary only once. Do these books somehow count less than those books that reference the diary, say, 50 times? Opting to collect data from the largest pool possible, this study proceeded under the notion that, even in the case the most miniscule see also notes, any citation is significant in the grand scheme of the diary’s scholarly life.

More complications arise when considering the complexity of the research process itself. First, the year of publication may not reflect the year of research. Scholars may consult sources for years and years before they arrive at a publishable result. In consequence, the extended nature of the research process makes it difficult to assign a single year to a publication and to frame the data in relation to the item’s archival lifespan. Second, counting the amount of times that a particular item was cited cannot be seen as a sound measure of the archival description’s effectiveness. With the digital age’s variety of access points, historians may not even consider scope and content notes or any other part of the finding aid. A third concern is the matter of the social relationship between archivist and researcher, whether by the relationship’s presence or by its absence. As scholars deliberately establish a relationship with archivists in order to find what they need, a dialogue takes place, but such a relationship may never arise due
to an item’s digital presence. With the ability to search transcriptions using the CTRL+F function, the historian can now isolate specific terms in the digitized resources. In a sense, the historian can essentially create his or her own access points that go beyond the subject headings of the finding aid. While face-to-face interactions with the archivist may inform the historian’s search for information, it is unclear how the educational role of the archivist translates to the digital world, especially in regards to non-historians who may lack expertise. Not everything can be contained in finding aids’ descriptions of collections nor will most users read lengthy expositions. It is also unclear if users will take advantage of instructional materials on archival websites. This is an area that needs extensive examination if online archives are to remain a vital part of users’ education and “archival intelligence” (Yakel, 2003).

Viewing the virtual research process as a social interaction could allow for new dimensions of discoverability that embraces the Web 2.0 environment of online finding aids (Krause and Yakel, 2007). While it is impractical for most archives to revise their finding aids on a continuous basis, allowing users to suggest additional and alternative subject terms and descriptions would increase access points for collections and could provide useful assistance for future users. Encouraging this participation presents a challenge, but the spirit of such a system lends itself to the idea that finding aids should embrace a diversity of interpretations and that the description and access of archival materials is multifaceted.

The relationship, or lack thereof, between description and interpretation is echoed in the ways that historians used the described entries. The degree to which the archival description matched historical interpretation was split down the middle. It cannot even
be said that the finding aid helped with retrieval, as the historians may not have even consulted it. The study, therefore, cannot suggest a direct linkage between the entries’ description and interpretation. Instead, these matches suggest areas in which archival judgment and historical judgment coincided. With these matches constituting only 49% of the references, the study cannot claim that the tendency goes either way. As archival description is itself interpretive, it naturally mirrors historical research. Further studies may stand to discover a greater matching between the two and, in so doing, may validate the practice of archival description in a time in which less processing has become the ruling trend.

Framing the data over time revealed correlations that reflect digitization and encoding’s positive effect on an item’s use. After its digitization, the diary experienced a boom in its usage. Before 2000, the data were too scattered to draw any significant statistical insight. After the finding aid’s encoding in 2008, the described entries saw a proportional increase in the amount of times they were referenced in comparison to previous years. By analyzing the use of collections on a larger scale and framing their usage in relation to time, archives may discover the effects that digitization has on use more broadly and how these effects differ across different genres of collections.

On an intellectual level, the idea behind such a study is important as it expresses the non-static nature of archival materials. Archival materials have lives that could potentially involve the clashing of description and interpretation. Because finding aids are ultimately products of their time, a finding aid authored in the 1990s reflects the context of the 1990s. As the very idea of permanence loses its favor, description itself becomes susceptible to the passage of time. If archivists serve the future, will finding
aids meet the contexts of future decades? Will finding aids even exist? Are they even relevant today? Given how much the subject of the scholarly works matched the subject headings of the collection, time has treated the Wadley diary relatively well, but other examples must exist in which the archival life of an item has been outpaced by its scholarly life.

The scrutiny of finding aids is not a new idea. Light and Hyry (2002), for instance, proposed the implementation of colophons to part the curtain between the archivist and the user. In a similar fashion, finding aids may better meet researchers’ needs if they also documented how other researchers have used particular collections. In this way, the finding aid would take on an almost bibliographic aspect. Signifying a collaboration between archivist and researcher, the finding aid would represent the meeting of both archival description and scholarly interpretation. A researcher would know that the Wadley diary inspired works on subjects that go beyond what the finding aid describes. As a hypothetical proposition, this idea would be predicated on the close relationship between the researcher and the archivist and also on the willingness of archivists to see themselves not as watchful gatekeepers but as one voice among many.

Greater understanding of related materials, increased transparency, and more detailed contextualization—these would be the benefits of such a development as they speak to the evolving values of the profession, embrace the open and collaborative environment of the digital world, and push the reimagining of finding aids even further.
VI. CONCLUSION

The Sarah Lois Wadley diary, by the very nature of a woman’s Civil War-era diary, represents an intimate look into the political and cultural context of both a nation at war with itself and a human being simply living her life. For this reason, the diary has attracted the attention of many historians who have utilized its insights to research a variety of subjects. In attempting to understand their materials and in the recent push to recognize diverse perspectives and the subjectivity of the profession, archivists have a responsibility in understanding that historical materials have a scholarly life that is both intertwined with how they are described and, paradoxically, ambivalent to it. Neither an archival item’s existence outside the archives nor its existence inside the archives is static, and as time passes the effects of digitization and online encoding will become more salient. The purpose of the finding aid goes beyond retrieval. It also lies in providing contextual information. By recognizing that users access materials from multiple avenues and by expanding the notion of archival description to include the perspectives of more than just the archivist, archivists will more effectively meet the needs of users and allow the profession to advance to a greater degree of transparency and collaboration.
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