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Patrimonial collections: instruments for education and development

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Abstract:

Our experiences with management of patrimonial collections in the Medellín Pilot Public Library for Latin America, one of three of UNESCO's pilot public libraries.

Medellín treasures its heritage. The city's founding families donated the initial collections. The Antioquia Room [Sala Antioquia], representing the Department [of Antioquia], was established in 1985, with donations of personal papers of Antioquian writers, private libraries with first editions, classical music recordings, and photographic collections of more than 1.6 million images, the history of Medellín since 1849.

We developed a methodology for preservation, conservation, and organization of a wide variety of materials. Our next task is to digitize these materials, enabling us to share more widely the richness of our memory.

INTRODUCTION

I will discuss today experiences of the Medellín Pilot Public Library for Latin America. Since the 1980s the Library's functions have included the acquisition, conservation and dissemination

of a wide array of cultural patrimony resources, textual, audio and visual, that comprise its Patrimonial Collections, within the framework of UNESCO's "Memory of the World Program." These include the private libraries of León de Greiff, his brother Otto, and Fabio Botero; Personal Archives of Antioquian and Colombian writers and of Maestro José María Bravo Márquez, director of the Orfeón Antioqueño; the Photographic Archive of Antioquia; a collection of classical recordings from Otto de Greiff and the Bank of the Republic; and the Virtual Library of Antioquia.

It has been essential for the public, students, teachers and researchers within our department to recognize and reaffirm their roots through these documents and visual materials. The people of our continent, perhaps more than in other parts of the world, require assurance of belonging to a past, through review of their history and culture, in order to sustain their fragile order.

SOME FACTS ABOUT OUR LIBRARY

UNESCO founded three public libraries in the 1950s: the first of these in New Delhi, [India], in 1951, and the third and last in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1958. The second is a model for Latin America and the Caribbean, established in our industrial and working class city [of Medellín], as an educational and cultural resource. Preparations began in 1954. By 1957 the agreement with UNESCO was completed and delivered to Colombia. For thirty-five years the Library was autonomous and operated with official and public support. Since 1992 Colombia's Ministry of National Education has administered it.

HOW UNESCO GUIDED THE LIBRARY FROM ITS FOUNDING

Fundamental rights have always guided the Library's mission, because without these we would not have freedom of expression, nor free access to information and knowledge nor to creativity, also a right of adults and children.

The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mexico, 1982) stated:

"... culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs..."

MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAM

The patrimonial collections are precisely those embracing our traditions and beliefs; the value of memory is preserved in these archives. When a writer, photographer, painter or illustrator passes away or an Antioquian business disappears, they find their way to the Medellín Pilot Public Library for Latin America. As evidence of this, the public considers the Library as its own and refers to it as "The Pilot," a beacon that guides them throughout the city.

HISTORY OF THE PATRIMONIAL ARCHIVES

How did they arrive at "The Pilot."? By the river, some would say, that always leads to the sea of knowledge. Because of their trust and affection for this library, grandparents, parents and children find their way to this center where all cultural activities flow together. It is part of their daily lives. Writers, photographers, artists, and musicians donate the most precious part of their lives: their struggles with words of a manuscript, their most memorable illustrations, photographs that bring to life anonymous figures as well as long departed grandparents. Analog recordings, now reformatted, accompany those with a passion for classical music in sessions of spiritual retreat.

COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

The Antioquia Room [Sala Antioquia]: When one enters the Antioquia Room, one "breathes" Antioquia--its geography, history, customs-- in the correspondence between writers, in their manuscripts and art catalogs, in inventories, folders, bookstacks, or in the map collection. An intellectual consults a subject and, as always, encounters other topics, which lead to yet another search, another conquest of knowledge. Our heritage resides here, awaiting our desire for information. Here students from other municipalities discover the history of their elders, which is also their own history. These same students return as grown men and women in search of specific works about their region. Some become civic leaders and information and knowledge about their heritage is invaluable for developing another cultural center or a center of memory.

Private Libraries: Surrounding the Antioquia Room are books donated by the families of Fabio Botero and León de Grieff. The library of Don León, as he is called, or familiarly "León," takes us on travels around the world with French writers, whose works are not even found in France, first editions in all languages, works about the campaigns of Napoleon, world history, biographies, essays ... At one time these books occupied shelves in "The Room of the Owl," the salon in which Don León conversed with other writers in the collection. Time and space did not exist there; a "virtual" place before the word ever existed. It is an unusual collection in which the poet recorded notes about his daily life, fragments of poetry, drawings, and held conversations with authors such as Rabelais, possibly while accompanied by a consecrated good bottle.

Personal Archives of Writers: Five are housed in a file cabinet. Two were great friends: Carlos Castro Saavedra and Manuel Mejía Vallejo, who lived during the same period--1923, 1924 and 1989, 1998. It is not important that one passed away earlier; his memories survived in the other. Both were poets and journalists, and the second was a novelist, essayist and journalist. Drawing and painting also united them. In these archives one finds the "news" of Manuel Mejía, his written thoughts spanning fifty years--communicated in his Writer's Workshop held in "The Pilot" during fifteen years--and his manuscripts and correspondence. Neither is asleep in his photographic archive; they are alert awaiting the next consultation by a faithful researcher.

The Nothingists (*Nadaistas*), a tribe of rebel poets of the 60s, continue their discussions in their folders, about Nothing (*La Nada*), an invention of their leader Gonzalo Arango. Young people visit them in search of guidance they know they will not find.

Javier Arango Ferrer, born in 1900, was an essayist and ophthalmologist who preferred travel, archaeology, literature, and medical mythology. Passionate about the search for art in Mexico, Ecuador and Peru, he followed in the footsteps of the Quito School to Popayán, Colombia. Passionate about drawings of colonial churches--he single handedly restored colonial houses in his country, incurring the indignation of academically-trained architects-- about folk dances and, above all, humor of traveler and poet.

In an archive in progress, of Don José María Bravo Márquez (1901-1952), we already recognize its richness: manuscripts of music scores, history of music, translations of Germanic lieder, notebooks, personal papers, programs of the Orfeón Antioqueño, the orchestra he directed, among other items.

Procedures: Upon receipt of personal archives, the first conservation tasks are cleaning and fumigation. Preservation reformatting is an ongoing activity. Next the archives are classified according to the appropriate activities of each individual: teacher, writer, journalist, correspondent, artist and various others. Press and photographic archives are created. We research references to other texts within documents and correspondence. Then information is entered into the online system and disseminated in conferences, seminars, and workshops and on the Library's Web pages (www.bibliotecapiloto.gov.co). Among the numerous products are bio-bibliographies, indexes, CDROM, referential databases, catalogs, chronologies, exhibitions, publications, videos and research results.

Historical Documentary Photographic Archive: The Medellín Pilot Public Library acquired a collection of more than 1.6 million images within the past six years. It contains photographic collections of the Rodríguez Brothers, Daniel Mesa et al., Julio Racines, Pastor Restrepo, Benjamín de la Calle, Gabriel Carvajal Pérez, and other visual documents of Guillermo Mel González, Fabio Rodríguez-FAREZCO, Gabriel Buitrago, Jairo Osorio G., Fotografía Americana, Horacio Gil Ochoa.

Classification of material: is by type of support: glass, metal, cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate, polyester and paper; black and white are separated from color. Next, materials in black and white are classified according to type of support, beginning with glass. Nitrate based films are copied as quickly as possible because of their chemical instability.

Cleaning: comes after classification and requires a place with good ventilation. Established protocols must be followed according to the type of material being cleaned.

Cataloging: defines subject content and subtopics for research. Catalog cards are created, designed and held in the Center for Visual Memory.

Virtual Analysis: physical analysis, identifies the presence of chemical residue, use of adhesives, inappropriate mountings on board, paper or glass, cracks or breakage in glass, loss of emulsion, contamination by insect droppings, unintentional scratches on images.

Conservation: includes glass mounts, copying of negatives on safety film and manual restoration of positive images.

Environmental conditions of the Photographic Archive: include humidity control, air conditioning, elimination of dust, ceramic or waterproof flooring, tungsten lighting, with no daylight permitted, water-based paint on walls and limitations on persons entering the archive. The archive is cleaned twice a week with a formaldehyde solution and manually vacuumed with a water-based receptacle.

Online processing: using a special computer program, the material is listed by subjects, subtopics, dates, places and authors.

Dissemination: materials from the Photographic Archive appear in various products:

On CDROM:

- *Fotografía en Latinoamérica y el Caribe en el siglo XIX y comienzos del XX.* Colima, Mexico : CENEDIC y Universidad de Colima, 1998. (Spanish, French, English text)
- *Cien años de arquitectura en Colombia, 1880-1980.* UNESCO.

In numerous books:

- *Melitón Rodríguez, fotógrafo: momentos, espacios, personajes, Medellín, 1892-1922.* [Medellín:] Consejo de Medellín y Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín para América Latina, 1995.
- *Gabriel Carvajal, retratos.* [Medellín:] Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano, 1999.
- *La bicicleta, mi cámara y yo: el mundo de ciclismo de Horacio Gil Ochoa,* [Medellín:] Fondo Editorial Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín para América Latina y Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2002.

In various exhibitions: selections from the Archives of Melitón Rodríguez y Benjamín de la Calle, in Seville, Spain, 2001, and in London, England, and lectures on photography and the holdings of the Photographic Archive.

On the Library's Web page (www.bibliotecapiloto.gov.co): access for visitors to the site to photographic galleries, summary chronologies, manuscripts of works in the archives, and publications. The Author's Library displays each writer's bio-bibliography, works and photographs. A lengthy introduction describes the work of the Archive.

Virtual Library of Antioquia:

The library system of the University of Antioquia and the Medellín Pilot Public Library initiated this project in 2002. It consists of a digital library on the Web, with authors from the Department of Antioquia and texts about the Antioquian region, dating from the 19th century. Subject coverage includes literature, history, sciences, philosophy, politics, religion, communication and transportation, architecture, engineering, medicine, journalism, caricature, memoirs and biography, photography, music, arts, and personal archives among others. The Medellín Pilot Public Library contributed much of the content relating to literature, caricature, journalism, photography, history, biography and the arts.

CONCLUSION

Receipt of a patrimonial archive, textual, audio or visual, implies certain responsibilities and duties. Conservation, organization, classification and dissemination of materials donated to us by a family, an author, or an artist is similar to the care and attention required for a person who has been entrusted to us. One of our duties is to inform the people of our department about the archive. "Memory of the World" certainly begins with our own memory. When Manuel Mejía Vallejo read selections from his books in Moscow, those in attendance approached him to share their amazement; his works might have been written in Russia. Every human being, when observed and analyzed, is part of a great family. Thus are the Patrimonial Archives of the Medellín Pilot Public Library. We invite others to develop similar archives in other countries, based on our experiences with the preservation of our memory, in all fields, not allowing memory of our history or of our writers to fade. Promoting knowledge and access to information about the past for the public, students, and researchers serves in educating them now and in the future.

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