

CHANGING LANDSCAPES: THE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE IN A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article explores both a redefinition of the role of the university archive in civil society and fresh perspectives on its changing role. The process of change in the university archives due to changes in societal landscapes is also presented. University archives in South Africa do not have a long history of existence, as they only started operating as separate divisions in most tertiary institutions in the late 60's. At some universities they still function as a part of the university libraries. The experience of Wits University Archives is used as a case study to show its role in preserving history of this academic institution as well as its involvement in the preservation of national history. Wits Archives can be proud of being the oldest university archives in South Africa and also keeps very valuable and internationally known paper collections. Students and academics of this institution were always actively involved in shaping the university and also national history. During the last few years the focus of the student population has changed and therefore the role of archives and its approach towards these changes should also be different. The article addresses some of the important issues concerning the functioning of Wits University Archives and the strategies it has employed to move away from the traditional role as a pure keeper of University history.

Key words: University archive, transformation, Wits archives, South African universities archives, Legislation

Introduction

University Archives in South Africa do not have a long history as they only started operating at higher educational institutions in the late 1960's. In most cases the academic archives were established as part of the universities' libraries. Very few of them started operating as a separate division. There is still not much professional literature available regarding the history and development of the university archives in South Africa and very little research has been done in this specific field. To be able to analyze the role of these establishments in South Africa one will have to consider the political situation in this country before 1994 – the year of the first democratic elections and the start of significant political changes in the history of this country. In order to do so a few words should be mentioned about the general situation in archival institutions in South Africa before the year 1994.

The most important factor at this time is that the university archives were operating independently from the National Archives, which being under government control only served the State. Academic archives were mostly serving their own institutions and communities such as staff, students and researchers. The professional organization for archivists called the South African Society of Archivists (SASA) was founded in 1960, and was operating under the control of the National Archives and its members could only be government archivists. The professional training for archivists was provided exclusively by the National Archives.

Prior to 1994, statutory bodies such as universities were excluded from the provisions of archival legislation. In 1996, the National Archives and Records Service Act (No 43 of 1996) changed this situation. As the university archives were sidelined and working independently without any support or cooperation, archivists from other archival institutions came up with the idea of establishing an organization which would promote, support and cooperate between different types of archival establishments like : business, churches, libraries, museums and especially, universities. Such an organization was founded in 1978 and named The Association for Archivists and Manuscript Librarians (AMLIB). The event happened at the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand.

This specific association was actively involved in promoting the university archives and helping them operate. AMLIB was operating for some time, but unfortunately in 2000 it stopped its activities for an unknown reason. SASA continued operating throughout the country and from the early 90's began participating in the process of transformation of the archival profession. The organization began to attract active archivists from other non-governmental institutions.

After 1994 all types of archives in the new Democratic South Africa were in great need of transformation and redefinition, or as Verne Harris, former Deputy Director in the National Archives (now with the Nelson Mandela Foundation) called it "refiguring". He discussed this issue jointly with other co-authors in the publication of 2002 *Refiguring the Archive*. They state in the introduction of this book that "The archive - all archive-every archive- is figured" and at the same time argue that South African "archives require transformation, or refiguring. The figuring by our apartheid and longer pasts must be challenged, and spaces must be opened up in the archives by a transforming society."(Harris 2002:7).

Some "refiguring" of the archive has already taken place through the implementation of many changes concerning their preservation and use as well as adjusting their functions in a new democratic society. The University of the Witwatersrand was a pioneer in this process, by organizing and hosting a Project in 1998 concerning archival issues. The Project was hosted by the Graduate School for Humanities and Social Sciences of Wits University in cooperation with the South African History Archive (SAHA) also housed at Wits. It consisted of a series of 13 seminars presented by 22 speakers from different continents (USA, Europe, and Africa). The Project tried to bring together archival theory and practice. The discussions gave an opportunity to students and academics to exchange some new ideas and opinions. As a result of this workshop the new postgraduate archives course "Reading the Trace: Memory and Archives" was started by the Graduate School for Humanities. This course was designed for archivists and historical researchers. The Project was a part of refiguring the archives internationally.

The new legislation developed after 1994 concerning different types of archives including the university archives

One of the very first important achievements in democratizing archival institutions in South Africa was the National Archives of South Africa Act, which has established the framework for building a new archival system for the entire country. Another very significant act providing the constitutional right of access to records and information held by private and public institutions is the Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000. This Act establishes universities as governmental bodies, which has a great impact on the managing of their information resources by the universities. According to this Act, universities have to develop appropriate policies concerning the control over records, their retention and disposal as well as training of staff. The Act is beneficial to the archives of universities as it helps them gain the prestige and recognition as professional institutions and not be considered as places of storage of old records.

Other pieces of new legislation concerning archival institutions which were promulgated in South Africa after 1994 included: Legal Deposit Act operative in 1998 and the National Heritage Act implemented in 1999. The Legal Deposit Act No. 54 of 1997 played a major role in providing for the preservation of the national heritage and to ensure cataloguing and access to documents published in South Africa. The Act also provided for access to government information. The National Heritage Act No. 25 of 1999 has an extended role to play in the protection and management of the National Heritage of the entire country. The Act introduces an integrated system for the identification, assessment, management and protection of the heritage resources of South Africa. This legislation also aims at promoting cooperation and good governance at all levels as well as encouraging communities to conserve their legacy for future generations. All of these legislations have an impact on keeping archives to various degrees.

One could now pose an important question: How changes in archival legislation and operations affected the university archives? The transformation process had definitely changed (up to a certain extent) the way an academic archives operates today. Prior to 1994, university archives were mainly serving the academic institutions - internal

staff, students and researchers while access to users outside the campus was very limited.

Due to all the political and social changes in our society, including the dramatic changes in the student demography at South African universities, the role and the way of serving very different users of academic archives has changed by, firstly becoming a much more accessible repository to the general public. Our universities became racially diverse places of multinational education where the number of students, especially from under privileged backgrounds, has increased dramatically, which means that new cultures and traditions of various groups of students have to be documented and that archives must become involved in the student's life and attract them to its use as well as educating them about the existence and importance of university archives.

The process of transformation in the archival field is continuing and requires time and resources to be able to fulfill all the new demands concerning the operation of archives in today's Democratic South Africa. At present, the university archives can freely join different professional organizations as members with which they can closely cooperate and exchange some ideas. In many cases staff members of academic archives have professional education in the field and often participate in local and international conferences, which is very beneficial for these institutions as it makes them more recognizable on a national and international level.

Brief overview of some of the South African universities archives

After 1994 more archival institutions were established at South African universities. Some of them operate independently as separate divisions, others as part of the university libraries or manuscript collections. A few examples will be discussed. Some of these repositories are more accessible than others and offer different services. This information was adapted from the latest publication entitled *A Directory of archival repositories in South Africa*, published by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa and the Department of Arts and Culture in 2005.

University of Cape Town Libraries: Manuscripts and Archives

The university archives of UCT first started through the collection of manuscripts by the University Librarians. In 1960 a separate section was established offering a reading room for researchers. The acquisition policy of this section of Manuscripts and Archives concentrates mainly on collecting manuscripts relating to the political, social, cultural and economic history of the Western Cape. Other records concerning the past and the present of students and staff are also collected as well as the personal papers collections. Archive holdings also include: pamphlets, photographs and some publications. Senate minutes and other UCT administrative archival documents are collected and kept in the Administrative Archive and Records Centre at the university.

Special attention is given to the valuable collection entitled "UCT through the Years - Groote Schuur Campus, 1900- Present" housed at the Manuscripts and Archives Department and through the presentation of specially selected photographs, the history of the Groote Schuur Campus which forms a major part of UCT is documented. There is a Guide to the Manuscripts for users in the UCT Libraries as well as inventories of individual collections. Access to the collections and records is provided mainly to post-graduate students and researchers. It does seem to be quite limited as the general public is not mentioned here.

University of the Western Cape Institute for Historical Research

The archives of this tertiary institution started in 1978 with the appointment of their first archivist. With the development of the university an urgent need appeared for organizing the repository where the university's official papers would be safely kept. This repository became the official archives of the university. The core holdings are divided into two sections: the first keeps and protects papers concerning the university history and extended records of the administration. The other section holds the private collections donated by individuals and different organizations, clubs, churches and Trade Unions. Finding aids include: internally published aids for the University Papers. Access for the UWC collections can be obtained

by permission of the Registrar and for Private Collections is permitted by the owner/trustee/Director of the Institute for Historical Research.

University of Venda

The archives of this university operates as part of the Library and it was only started in 1990, when the Library received an extended donation from one of its professors (John Blacking) – researcher on Venda music and culture. This donation was followed by the establishment of the Special Collections section which is now divided into two separate subsections: 1) Theses/Dissertations and 2) Personal papers donated by Prof Eskia Mphahlele. The holdings concerning the university history are very limited. The Special Collections section combines the materials, like manuscripts, articles, books regarding Venda and the Limpopo Province as well as theses/dissertations of university graduates and publications (articles, papers) by academic staff. The access to the materials is limited as the section operates on a closed access policy allowing the use of holdings under strict supervision. The collections and other records are available to outside researchers on request. Access to the general public was not considered.

University of Port Elizabeth Archives

The University archives came into existence in 1974. In 1995 the division was accommodated into a new spacious venue at the Library premises providing better access for the users. The core holdings include: documents created by the university staff and students including their publications and documents concerning their activities. The other records kept in the archives are of enduring administrative, legal, financial, historical and research value. The university archives preserve and store the only documents related to the University of Port Elizabeth. Access to the archives is unlimited and available to any person who will use them according to its rules and regulations. The library catalogue is provided as a searching aid.

University of KwaZulu – Natal Pietermaritzburg campus

The University Archives were established at the beginning of 1976. The first archivist (actually a University Library staff member) was

employed on a part-time basis serving two campuses of the university – Pietermaritzburg and Durban. It was in 1979, that the new Archivist was appointed although still working on a temporary basis. At first the Archives were temporarily accommodated in the University Library building in Pietermaritzburg, but in 1999 this followed an expansion which then had to be moved to new premises on Golf Road (part of the Pietermaritzburg campus). The Archives operated under the management of the University Library from its establishment until the beginning of 1982 when it was transferred to Administration to be transferred back in 1997 under the management of the Library.

The University Archives collects records of permanent value, which illustrate the history and development of the University such as: publications, documents, photographs, press-cuttings, audio-visual material and electronic documents. Other publications include: University calendars, faculty handbooks, graduations programmes and V/C annual reports. The minutes of the University Council, Senate and faculties Boards are also kept there. The University Archives holdings are in the Library Campus catalogue. A card index and Guide for the Collections are also available. Currently the university is one of the very few in South Africa that is at the stage of implementing a pilot project – electronic documents, but not yet accessible to the University community. The staff members include an Archivist and Principal Archives Assistant. Access is provided to all - staff and students of the five campuses of KwaZulu-Natal University as well as to the public including researchers from South Africa and abroad.

University of Pretoria Archives

The University of Pretoria Archives was established in 1994, making it one of the youngest among academic archives in South Africa. Its acquisition policy states that all the materials relevant to the history and development of the university are collected and kept there. They include: minutes, annual reports and original documents about important activities of faculties and departments; publications such as brochures, catalogues, newspaper articles; photographs, videos, films and other visual material; memorabilia of historical and cultural value relating to the University. Finding aids are quite advanced compared to other universities and include: an Archives' computerized catalogue, printed catalogues as well as a card catalogue system.

Collected documents kept in archives are registered in a Register of Documents which serves as a finding aid for them. Access to the archives is open to different users including local and international researchers, university staff and students, the media and the general public.

UNISA – University of South Africa Archives (Pretoria)

The section of Archives and Special Collections at UNISA was developed as part of the University Library. The UNISA Archives collects and preserves archival material relating to the university's history and development, as well as the administration, staff and students. The material collected here includes: minutes of Senate and Council meetings, university calendars, graduation programmes, examination papers, newspaper clippings, papers and publications by staff members, photographs and other audio-visual materials. Theses and dissertations of UNISA students are kept separately in a special book collection. Students' files are not kept in the University Archives housed in the Library, but their records are available at the Bureau for Management Information. UNISA is currently establishing a University Records Management Centre. These University Archives enjoy having a very professional service run by four staff members who are fully qualified as archivists. Finding aids consist of: printed catalogues, inventories, lists and computer catalogues. Access to UNISA Archives is available to scholars and students for research purposes. By special request or appointment, the general public is also allowed to be a user. This fact was actually not specified in this source of information. Thanks largely to having very professional equipment, ideal conditions of storage of archival holdings including a perfect environment for the processing and conservation of materials as well as having fully qualified staff members in service, UNISA Archives represents one of the most professional and modern archives among universities in South Africa.

University of Johannesburg Library and Information Centre, Rare Book Collection and Archives

The University Archives exists and operates since 1980 as part of the Library. Unfortunately this division does not operate on a full time basis, as the 2 employed staff members who supposedly deal with

the University Archives issues, also carry out their duties in between other jobs and only have a student assistant to help them. The core holdings include: academic journals, minutes of meetings of the different university bodies, various publications and monographs. The University Archives Committee which consists of Library staff, a representative of Historical Studies and the head of the Central Administration is looking after other interests of the university archives and is trying to get more support from the university, especially towards getting a full-time archivist appointed. The Archives only collect records with enduring value, which reflect the University history since its founding up to the present day. University archives are housed on the premises of the Special Collections Department of the University of Johannesburg. The finding aids are available to the users as well as computerized indexes. Access to the archives and collections is available for students, staff, researchers and members of the public.

The very brief information provided here does not include any details concerning the role of academic archives in today's much changed society in South Africa. Their involvement in different community projects and contributions towards forming a new national history is still not often discussed in an open arena. Unfortunately not much has been written yet by professional people concerning these issues. Certain attempts are made by these institutions to become more useful to the general public, but it is still a process under development. There are still a few obstacles delaying the full process of transformation of academic archives, which could bring them much closer to the communities both locally and nationally. They usually include:

- many of the university archives lack full time professional staff which impacts on their quality of service;
- many of them do not have status as independent institutions and are often attached to libraries, relying on them financially;
- academic archives are often under funded and struggle to get enough financial support from their universities to be able to function according to internal and external needs;
- some of the divisions still have a very limited and restricted access to the general public;
- many university archives of today have not implemented records management programmes which are important for the

- proper managing of their records, especially in today's electronic environment; and
- there is still a lack of proper communication and cooperation between the archival divisions of different universities, which could be very beneficial for their operation and in improving their service.

The answer to the question: 'Which strategies should university archives employ to be able to improve and extend their service, not only to its own community but also to the general public' will not be an easy one. There are a few suggestions that one could make in this matter. Firstly all the academic archives should become more accessible to an outside world and get more actively involved in documenting the local and national history.

One has to remember that in our new democratic country every citizen can be considered as a potential user of the archives – both public and private which is provided by the new legislation discussed earlier. Prior to 1994 access to these institutions was restricted as a result of being controlled by the old government. The University archives could try collecting records concerning the local and regional history which is often closely involved with the events of society, different communities and the state as a whole. Good relationships with the donors would be very beneficial in this case. Using different methods of publicizing archival activities by using media would also be very helpful.

Another very beneficial way of getting closer and more involved with the lives of people in our country, is for academic archives to extend their outreach programmes through organizing educational programmes and workshops. The important fact which impacts all these changes is still going on in the process of transformation which remains extremely challenging and is aimed at improving the lives of our people regardless of their race, religion or social status. A few interesting and useful ideas concerning the transformation projects for archival institutions in South Africa were proposed and introduced by Michele Pickover, curator of Historical Papers and Manuscripts Division of the University of the Witwatersrand, in the *Newsletter of the Association of Manuscript Librarians* in 1997.

They will now be presented as an example which could be implemented by any of the university archives.

- 1) Affirmative Action which requires the implementation of government's Employment Equity Policy adopted in 1996. It is well known that people of colour (Blacks, Indians, Coloureds) never had any opportunity to join the archival profession. According to the previous government, it was such a sensitive profession that it was only reserved for whites. The special programme should be established for training representatives of all racial groups in the archival field and give them a chance to be employed in different types of archives.
- 2) The collection of non-public records or private archives. It would encourage and popularize collecting of private collections from individuals or organizations not considered as governmental bodies in the National Archives of South Africa Act (No 43 of 1996).
- 3) Private collections can help fill up the gaps in public records. All the archival institutions, especially academic divisions should collect the records for the future generations and should encourage private donors and organizations to deposit their collections, which could help in forming their own history and the history of this country.
- 4) Organizing exhibitions. These could be permanent, representing the historical developments in South Africa and organized by archival institutions. Cooperation between archives and other heritage institutions, like museums would be very beneficial in this matter. Other forms of exhibitions which could be used are of the mobile type which can be taken to the communities who have neither access nor the opportunity to visit the archives.
- 5) Outreach and public programmes which can help archival institutions to gain acceptance and respect by all citizens of South Africa. Public programming should be a part of the daily archival operations and accept visits of all the public members, regardless if they make an official appointment or not. The outreach programmes could include:
 - making and presenting videos to tour groups visiting the archives;
 - showing the operations of archival institutions;
 - tours and visits to archives by students and school groups;

- organizing “Open Days” inviting the general public to the archives and making them aware of its functions;
- cooperation with high schools all over the country and informing them about the career prospects in the archival profession;
- using media (TV, radio, press) to educate the general public on archives in our country and helping them to rediscover their identities;
- organizing open lectures or workshops for the community for the educational purposes and participating in local festivals;
- using networks (internet, World Wide Web) for establishing the Archives Website; and
- contributing to the school syllabus by participating in re-writing the next text books concerning the new history of South Africa.

This detailed description proves that archival institutions in South Africa, regardless of their type, do have an important role to play in the entire process of transformation and can make a great contribution to the documenting of history and are affecting the lives of all citizens of this country.

University of the Witwatersrand Archives as a case study

The University of the Witwatersrand is home to four diverse archival repositories: the Historical Papers Department, South African Historical Archive (SAHA), Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA), which are all housed at the oldest University Library named William Cullen Library, and the University Archives as a separate division housed in the administrative building – Senate House. These repositories will be briefly discussed.

The Department of Historical and Literary Papers

It was established in 1965 as part of the William Cullen Library, also called the Africana Library where it operates to this day. It has become the largest independent archives in South Africa. Historical Papers cares for approximately 4000 collections of historical, political and cultural importance. The papers kept here include large holdings

from churches, trade unions, political parties, different institutions and private individuals – historical, social, economic, legal, literary, etc. There is also a large collection of tapes, photographs, books, newspapers and journals, diaries, etc. All collections kept at the Historical Papers Division are listed in: *Guide to the Archives and Papers*. They are also used for the teaching needs of the University.

The Historical Papers records mainly illustrate the history of South Africa as well as the social, economic and political development of the city of Johannesburg, the province as well as the entire country. They are fully accessible to any user, especially to the general public. This year a large step forward in making the collections more accessible to its users was made by launching a new updated Historical Papers website which includes over 500 inventories available on line to users both locally and internationally. This division serves civil society and its holdings are extensively used by students, academics, researchers, filmmakers and writers from South Africa, as well as the rest of the African continent and abroad.

An important fact which needs mentioning is the serious space problem being experienced by Historical Papers for some time. The collections are being severely compromised by the unsuitable and inadequate storage areas. That is why there is an urgent need to enhance and upgrade the existing archival infrastructure. The building of a new archival/heritage centre would be a good solution and very beneficial to the University by increasing its reputation as a research and educational centre. The proposal concerning this idea has recently been submitted to the University Management and it is under discussion.

The Gay and Lesbian Archives for South Africa (GALA)

It was set up in 1997 as an autonomous project of the South African History Archives (SAHA) and is based at the Wits University William Cullen Library. It serves as a repository for records and materials relating to previously marginalized communities. GALA was established as a community archive that should serve the researchers, but at the same time should function as a repository of community histories. The collections include: photographs, video and audio cassettes, papers, posters, publications as well as legal records, memorabilia,

media coverage and life histories. There is an online guide to the collections available in the archive. GALA also has a website which is accessible to the broad public locally and internationally.

South African History Archive (SAHA)

SAHA was established in 1998 by the representatives of the Mass Democratic Movement. The institution is actively involved in the collecting and preservation of the documents, posters, pamphlets, brochures and other kind of material produced by the organizations that were opposing Apartheid. SAHA is an independent archive which is trying to recapture the lost and neglected historical records illustrating the struggle for justice in South Africa. It is managed by a Board of Trustees and obtains support from sponsors, especially from Canada, as well as other countries. In 1994 the SAHA Collection was moved to the University of the Witwatersrand William Cullen Library where it is based today. According to an agreement signed with Historical Papers, SAHA retains an authority over its collections but is also sharing its resources with this division as well as some aspects of management. Both organizations cooperate very closely and keep quite complex relationships. The SAHA archive is strongly community orientated and is available not only to the Wits Community but also to all members of the general public. The SAHA collections are listed in their *Guide to the Resources of the South African History Archive* and in the *Guide to the Historical Papers* published by this department. The list is also available on SAHA'S website.

University of the Witwatersrand Archives as part of central records office (including central registry and student registry)

Wits University Archives were established in 1965 together with the Historical Papers Division under control of the University Library, where they were operating until 1975 when the two divisions split. The University Archives Section continued to be housed in the Library until it moved to the 4th floor of Senate House in 1978. It is still serving its users at these premises up to the present day. The University Archives falls under Wits Administration and reports to the University Registrar. An important event in the history of this division was its merger with two other records departments – Student and Central Registries. The merger was recommended in 1997 by an

Institutional Support Review Sub-Committee prior to an Internal Records Repositories Review. The whole process was completed in 1999-2000 and formed the University Central Records Office which the archives became a part of.

The Central Records Office (CRO) is part of the Academic Administration Unit reporting to the Registrar. The merger process was part of a rationalization of the repositories and was supposed to have many advantages including financial savings, improving security and providing the possibility of making more effective use of staff competencies and experience. This establishment functions as the official repository for the records of the university administration, faculties, schools, departments, organizations, clubs, societies, and of the individuals involved with the university. The main responsibility of this Office lies with the providing and keeping of records and giving advice to the university departments, developing systems for effective control of documents and records and with an advice for implementing information and records management policies, standards, and procedures. In practice the Central Records Office is responsible for the survey, inventory, description, appraisal, disposition, and accession of official university records.

Student Registry as a part of the central records office, keeps all records relating to a student's study and stay at the university, which includes documents concerning admission, academic performance, financial aid, social involvement, discipline, etc. Most student records are transferred to and retained centrally in the Central Records Office of the University, which acts as the custodian or keeper of learners' records on paper and microfiche.

These records are managed in accordance with the following centrally approved policies and procedures: - A2002/283 "Guidelines on how to deal with enquiries about students"

- A2002/382 "University Documents: Presentation, Registration and Retention"
- A2003/3 "Access to University of the Witwatersrand Information: Policy developed in line with the Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000"
- A2003/384 "Policy on post-graduation verifications including transcripts and curricula"

- S2003/1802A “Senate Standing Orders on Higher Degrees”

The Records Manager, with the support of two supervisors and six archive assistants, is responsible for the coordination of the records management of the entire University. University records are the property of the University and they may not be destroyed without permission from the Records Manager who will establish retention rules in consultation with the Legal Adviser and the relevant Head of Department as well as the Registrar.

The central registry is also a part of the Central Records Office and functions as the official repository for the central administration’s current or active records. It contains documents relating to the management and administration of the University on a daily basis. The basic goal of this Division is to facilitate efficient and effective administration by ensuring the protection, accessibility and retrieval of records which after five years are transferred to the University Archives, microfilmed or destroyed in accordance with approved retention schedules. Access to the holdings of the Central Registry is restricted and available only to University entities.

The University Archives division is one of the most important establishments needed for the proper functioning of the entire University. It is also part of the CRO. The University Archives which was formed as a separate division in 1965 is the oldest university archives in South Africa. It holds records which date back to the establishment of the forerunner of the University, the School of Mines in Kimberley in 1896, which moved to Johannesburg in 1904. The University was officially established in 1922.

The University Archives is the repository for all the archival holdings of administrative, legal and historical significance to the University. It selects, preserves and makes records available documenting the origin, development and achievements of the University, as well as the activities of its officials, academic staff and students. Archival holdings include records of the University administration, printed materials about the University and the personal and professional papers of many academics and persons closely associated with the University. The material which has been collected comprises: - manu-

scripts including extended paper collections (correspondence, field notes, research notes, journals, photographs) mainly donated by staff members of the University. Well known donors include amongst others: Professors R. Dart, P. Tobias and W. Jeffreys. These records date back to the 1920s.

- books – publications by the Wits Press and monographs donated with papers
- other publications by the University such as: newsletters, pamphlets, university calendars, graduation programmes, staff members scientific publications in journals
- newspaper cuttings concerning the University and its staff and students
- photographs, an extended collection illustrating all the different events concerning the university history and its people
- memorabilia: trophies, academic robes and hoods, sports uniforms, medals, etc.
- exam papers and exam results
- theses and dissertations
- biographical files on most of the academic staff members
- minutes of meetings of Senate, Council and Administration as well as other administrative committees
- media materials: old films, tape records, video tapes, slides, CDs, etc.

An important part of the University Archives is the Microfilming Unit which provides microfilming of documents for ***Student and Central Registries*** as well as Inter-Library Loans and sometimes for outside users. Before 2001 this Unit used to do the microfilming of all the theses submitted to the Archives.

To continue the story on Wits Archives one must ask two important questions:

- 1) Who are the actual users of this establishment?
- 2) What is the core function of this division?

The answer to the first question is simple: the University Archives exists and operates primarily to serve staff and students as well as academic researchers. This used to be a traditional role for many years of this division concentrating on compiling and keeping the University history.

Democratic changes in South Africa after 1994 brought a different approach to the issue of the functioning of the Wits Archives. The whole University has changed from one traditionally serving English-speaking white South Africans enforced by the legislation during the years of apartheid to the University for students of all races, especially those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Every year from now all establishments of the University, including its archives, have to accommodate growing numbers of the student population. What strategies could be used to achieve these goals? How to make these young new users aware of the importance and benefits of using the University Archives? One could make a few suggestions concerning the ways of attracting the students to come and use the archival materials practically:

- making it as easily accessible as possible to them;
- organizing small archival exhibitions throughout the campus;
- using it as a tool for marketing, helping to gain the interest of all the students;
- informing the students about the services offered by archives and the value of the materials which they can use;
- publishing an information booklet;
- getting the students practically involved in operating archives by offering them part-time employment as student staff to carry out simple tasks like: clerical work (typing), photocopying, shelving theses, filing the cards or shredding the paper; these students helpers usually lack of any professional training but this work is beneficial for them as its broadens their education through direct contact with archival practice, historical documentation and research, and
- cooperating with the Financial Aid Office in order to get disadvantaged student helpers for archives as thereby helping them to pay for their studies and gain work experience.

The main purposes for using the academic archives by the university students include: writing assignments, projects, papers, research reports, essays or postgraduate theses. These forms of publicizing the University Archives can be used not only internally but also outside the campus for informing the general public and getting their attention as well as new users.

Wits Archives is a holder of many valuable collections, previously mentioned (Tobias, Dart, Jeffreys) which are very often a major attraction for overseas scholars visiting our archives and using them for research purposes. This fact plays an important role in defining Wits as a university of international stature. It also helps to bring local users and national researchers and postgraduate students from other institutions all over the country. The outreach to the local communities is increasing regularly, including the city of Johannesburg and our province of Gauteng. One has to remember that the history of our city and the history of Wits are inseparable. Our university has always been actively involved in the formation of Johannesburg's history, its region and the history of this country. Wits has always been committed to the removal of the stamp of racism on higher education in South Africa. The principle of academic freedom and the goal of an open university was continuously part of the Wits Liberal Programme. Over the years Wits academics and students prior to 1994 were involved in different political activities, like protest marches, demonstrations and participation in banned political organizations to fight for democracy in South Africa. Many of them were often detained, arrested and prosecuted including exclusions from the university. Through these activities they participated in the shaping of the history of their university and the country.

Today Wits lecturers and postgraduate students are involved in preparing and writing a new history for educational books for South African schools, and in the implementing of new syllabuses for history subjects. They are also actively participating in different projects presenting and preserving the previously neglected histories of communities in this country, their tradition, culture and the past of their predecessors. Academic Archives are appropriate places for collecting, preserving and keeping collections of regional history as the history of the university is always closely related to the country. They often complement each other. Such an exercise brings the University Archives and the general public closer and also helps to encourage research by students, academics and outside users. It does contribute towards the understanding of the vital historical value of archives for our entire society.

On the issue of Wits Archives' cooperation with the external institutions one could make a suggestion regarding the partnership

between the Archives and Local and Provincial Government in the area of professional training in the archival field. In practice this could work in the form of offering courses in archives and records management by its staff members and the government would provide the venues and participants. Other forms of such cooperative activities could include in detail, different kinds of outreach programmes discussed earlier, such as: community-related exhibitions, open lectures and workshops, audiovisual presentations, usage of publications and printed materials (brochures, news releases, calendars, photo histories), etc. They give an archivist the opportunity to communicate directly with the public and to openly present the archives' role in the daily life of the people. Unfortunately, in many cases the archives have either very limited or no resources for public programming. A good idea and worthy to try would be an appeal to the business world for some funding and support.

The Wits University Archives together with the Historical Papers Department recently applied to the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund for funding towards a very interesting project named: "Wits Archives – A National Treasure: Proposal for the maintenance and further development of archival heritage resources". The project contains details concerning the proposed development of a New Heritage Archive and Exhibition Centre to house the document collections and service many archive collections kept in the institution. It will be a community outreach Heritage Project which will involve the partnership of the Wits University, Local Government, the Inner City of Johannesburg as well as local communities and other organizations. So far the University have not received any response in this matter from the Lotto Fund.

In 2005, a cooperative team of the University Archives and Historical Papers Division applied again to the same Fund for financial support to run the Project: "Wits Endangered Archives Project" (WEAP) , which is actually a pilot project to identify and investigate the survival of vulnerable collections of national significance at the Central Records Office (Archives Division) and Historical Papers of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and to arrange for their preservation and accessibility. The very limited resources, especially the restricted financial support of the University for such a project, forced the Archives to request external financial assistance to

make its heritage resources nationally accessible and provide for their professional care and preservation.

This Project will be very beneficial to the University and to society through much needed job creation, skills transfer and capacity building as the specialist staff employed will share their expertise within the University and other tertiary institutions. By cooperation with outside organizations and research centers, the University will contribute towards saving and keeping the memory of disadvantaged communities and their struggle for justice. The Project will also serve students enrolled in the Heritage and Archival Courses offered through the Graduate School of Humanities at Wits University. At the same time it will assist the University in promoting the use of, and access to the national heritage resources in its care. Unfortunately, as in the case of the first Project, there has been no response in this matter from the National Lottery Fund as yet.

A few words must be mentioned about some of the problems which until this year used to affect the operation of the Wits Archives on a daily basis and impact the quality of the service offered to their users. There are two major problems which our University Archives were experiencing for quite some time – a chronic lack of space for the storage of the collections and other archival holdings and the shortage of staff whose abilities to provide the necessary services have been strained to the limits.

The storage areas for the collections of the Wits Archives have been at maximum capacity for a number of years, and the working areas used to be so constricted that it has become extremely difficult to carry out the processing of materials necessary to guarantee access to the material in the future. This chronic lack of suitable storage and working space severely compromises the growth of the University Archives Collections. The problem has become so serious that off-site storage for some files and documents was put in place. Unfortunately this is not a desirable solution for a long term as it is a costly exercise and access becomes extremely difficult. The University Archives Main Room also used to suffer from a lack of a dedicated research space for various archives users, which is proved by the fact that the tables currently being used were shared by the staff and

researchers. Another problem involving space is the almost non-existent paper conservation facilities for collections.

The Project presented earlier and proposing the construction of the New Heritage Archive and Exhibition Centre will be an excellent idea to solve the space problem and to provide the proper protection for the valuable archival collections. A few important facts relating to some very beneficial and significant changes which were implemented this year at Wits University Archives must be mentioned here. Thanks to the University's Management financial assistance and support, especially the office of the Deputy Registrar, renovations have been done to all the archives rooms. They include:

- painting and installing new blinds
- refurnishing all offices with more professional furniture
- creating more space for processing collections and other archival material
- organizing separate room for researchers only
- installing new compact shelving in the repositories
- relocating from the main repository some of the records in order to create more space for the collections
- refurnishing and redecorating the main foyer by putting in an archival exhibition for the visitors
- improvement of security by installing a new alarm
- employing an additional 4 staff members in the archives in order to improve the daily operations of this division and a quality service
- negotiations with the computer department concerning the procurement of a new records management system

All these positive changes implemented recently at Wits Archives have had a great impact on the quality of service offered to its users and makes this division a much more user friendly place. This is a good indication of the possibility to make the University Archives more professional and more accessible to various users.

Conclusion

This article has discussed a number of important issues concerning the University Archives and their role in the new democratic South Africa. They do not have a long history of existence in our country,

and although for a long time being both sidelined and excluded from the South African Legislation, they have always tried to serve the university community and outside users.

In the period before 1994 the only organization which was promoting and supporting the University Archives in South Africa was AMLIB (The Association for Archivists and Manuscript Librarians). This historical year brought many significant political changes in our country. These also applied to the different types of archival institutions. Have they really changed and in what way? The answer will be positive but not complete as the process of transformation is still taking place. Some significant changes have already been implemented, especially regarding the accessibility to the archives by the general public, as well as practical involvement in outreach programmes towards outside communities. The University Archives accepted a different approach to a diverse student population.

How different would the role of academic archives in the South African environment be and what should it include? A few elements could be added here, such as:

- 1) change of the role of academic archives from the traditional keeper of the university history and its development to an establishment which serves the community at large, both locally and internationally offering access to any member of the public;
- 2) different choices of collected material extended to collecting and keeping records concerning and contributing towards local, regional and national history not excluding university history; and
- 3) closer involvement of the archives in the daily lives of the citizens of our country through outreach programmes and open access to everyone.

Considering these suggestions one could propose that: University Archives still continues its role as a keeper of university history and the general manager of all its records, but in the new democratic country of South Africa it also plays a significant role in documenting and preserving the most important changes in our society, as well as participating in the building of our new national history. As an example of a new type of University Archives, the expanded use of the Wits Archives which now serves a very extended community, including local and international researchers, authors, filmmakers and

the entire civil society of South Africa as well as the rest of the African continent and abroad, can be cited.

One cannot forget the fact that the University Archives along with other institutions of this type, are still going through a process of transformation and trying to adopt all the democratic changes taking place in our society. In order to speed up this process, academic institutions should be encouraged to become more actively involved in the professional training of archivists by offering special courses in this field. At present our archivists have a very challenging role to play in trying to save the past and the present, thereby protecting citizen's rights. An interesting statement which supports the role of archives and archivists in a democratic society like the one we have currently in South Africa was made by Ketelaar (1992:5) when he states that:

Archives – well preserved and accessible to the people – are as essential in a free democracy as government of the people. Because archives are not only tools of the government, not only sources for historical research: access to public archives gives the people the possibility to exercise their rights and to control their government, its successes, its failures.

This should summarize the new opportunities for archival institutions in the new South Africa.

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