

The International Anarchist Archives:

A report on conditions and a proposal for action

Intro:

In large part, historians encounter the past through the bits of evidence stored in archives. This means that archives themselves have great sway over how our histories are written, and even how our identities form. Therefore, concepts like power and memory are very real forces in the dusty world of the archivist. Steve Lubar, a scholar at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, has commented that, “we must think of archives as active, not passive, as sites of power, not as recorders of power. Archives don’t simply record the work of culture; they do the work of culture.”¹ Archives have influence over the narratives which give our lives meaning and over our ties to nation-states and other economic systems. Since the French Revolution, archives have also played an important role in constructing social perception and in centralizing governmental power. It is no wonder then that the anarchists, one of the groups most active in opposition to Capitalism and the State, have received marginal coverage in archival records (at least outside of police files).

Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg, in the introduction to the Sawyer Seminar essays,² comment that “what goes on in an archive reflects what individuals, institutions, states, and societies imagine themselves to have been, as well as what they imagine themselves

¹ Terry Cook, “Remembering the future: appraisal of records and the role of archives in constructing social memory,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 179.

² The Sawyer Seminar, a year-long seminar held at the University of Michigan (2000-2001), sought to look at archives, documentation, and societal memory from interdisciplinary perspectives.

becoming.”³ This control over the history of a people is clearly demonstrated by the manner in which the transatlantic anarchist movement has been excluded from public memory.

However, the anarchists were always a self-reliant bunch of rebels, and as such no more depended on capitalist archives than they did capitalist publishers. Thus, in the context of the anarchist movement, archives demonstrate both the negative implications of power in constructing historic understanding and the self-affirming potential of organic, community-based, archival projects. This paper hopes to examine the relationship between radical social movements like the anarchists and their volunteer archives, report on the general characteristics of these archives, and suggest ways that historians and activists can help improve archival conditions.

There are two ways in which archives interact with social movement like the anarchists. The first is from above and revolves around problems faced by scholars attempting to do research on anarchists. Due to underfunding and the lack of material in public archives, very little material from the anarchists has ever been preserved or made available to historians. This limits the kind of work historians can do on the anarchists, it limits our ability to fully understand their cultural impact and influence on past events, and it even limits our view of future horizons. For, as Blouin and Rosenberg comment, archives can affect not only, “how the past is shaped and represented but how it is linked to the future...” and, “the process of

³ Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg, ed., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), ix.

assembling archives and the process of providing access to those archives help to structure (or 'write') what the future will be like."⁴

Anarchists also interact with the archives from below, as the producers of culture and archival documents. Members of radical social movements often attempt to preserve their past and neither wants to see their story re-written nor their collections removed to distant and often inaccessible places of learning. Thus, the movements themselves have a stake in archival issues. All too often, anarchists have been misrepresented in official histories. To be fair, this has often been caused by the limited and corrupt source material available to scholars. This problem is complicated when archival objects are removed by organizations, state run or otherwise, thus robbing the items of cultural context. This is one reason why helping the anarchists manage their own archives is the best solution available for both the anarchists and for historians researching anarchist history.

To understand the importance of this problem, one must understand the political nature of archives, and anarchist history in general. The conflict-ridden formation of the current nation-state system is a story that is often glazed over in public histories. In order to shape history in a way that benefits their own narrative, dominate forces do not need to cover anything up, as much as exclude it from the conversation. This occurs both within the academy, where courses and departmental geologies limit discussion, and in the archives, where funding and privatization of collections delineates the valued from unvalued bits of evidence that historians have access to in their attempt to make sense of the past.

⁴ Francis Blouin and William Rosenburg, ed., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 2.

As Blouin and Rosenberg point out, “the ways in which records are acquired, appraised, organized, and cataloged clearly help to determine what historians and others will be able to explore about the past and how, consequently, the past can be ‘produced.’”⁵ This means that the silences which exist in our archives are of critical importance.

Terry Cook also reminds us all that, as archivists, “We are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not.”⁶ Only by supporting dissident archives, that is to say, only by preserving and making available evidence of past resistance, can we as archivists help scholars write anything resembling an accurate history of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Activist Archives:

Luckily, the anarchist movement never looked for support or approval from either wealthy benefactors or governmental bodies. Historians of anarchism must seek out archives that are in fact anarchist in support and structure as well as content. While there are of course some very notable collections of revolutionary material in both state and university collections, the majority of preserved items remain in the hands of the producing communities. In both personal collections and in volunteer-run archives, the remains of past social movements are often preserved by the people who once participated in the very struggles that are being documented.

⁵ Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg, ed., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 2.

⁶ Terry Cook, “Remembering the future: appraisal of records and the role of archives in constructing social memory,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 170.

Much like regional Historical Societies, a passion for history and a belief that the stories held in the archive are inherently important to future generations characterize these spaces. However, without training, the unseen biases of these volunteer archivists can also warp the historic record, for, as Cook points out, “The major act of historical interpretation occurs not when historians open boxes but when archivists fill the boxes.”⁷ Thus, professional archivists and trained historians cannot ignore the condition of these volunteer archives, but must, rather, help them out wherever and however possible.

The anarchist archives face a series of real world problems which have implications for researchers as well as activists. It is hard to pay the rent, let alone maintain an archive as it should be maintained, on passion and dedication alone. Thus, every aspect of a typical archival project, from the storage space, to the acid-free folders, to the ability to make finding aids available or to digitize items are all huge obstacles for these archives. Often, they are in fact obstacles the archive’s community can not clear, causing the loss of material and the degradation of social memory and historic consciousness. Other times, the archives hibernate until a new generation of activists or a new surge in social activism reawakened popular interest in the collections. During such times researchers are left famished for the kinds of material not available in more established collections.

However, the anarchist archives have some unique strength which will perhaps lighten the load for archivists involved in their maintenance and care. Because they are often tied to a highly energetic and active community, anarchist archives offer a chance to expand research

⁷ Terry Cook, “Remembering the future: appraisal of records and the role of archives in constructing social memory,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 171.

material and do archival outreach at the same time. This not only raises awareness about the social movement documented by the archive, but actually raises people's awareness of the process of "remembering" in general and the role of archives in particular.

Second, anarchist archives follow a form of organizing which is at odds with modern management theory, and which offers unique responses to post-modern criticisms of archival practice, especially those around security and access. While security is obviously of high importance to archives storing items of great monetary value or full of private information, the anarchist archives are especially public in nature. Some have compared the traditional archival reading room to the panopticon prison discussed by Foucault. Eric Ketelaar, in his Sawyer Seminar paper, comment that, "In most search rooms the archivist on duty is seated on an elevated platform from which he or she has a panoptic view, global and individualizing, of each and every "inmate" of the search room."⁸ From this "panoptical archive," to the danger of separating historic material from its original context, anarchist archives present an alternative model to those which exist in most professional institutional.

These anarchist archives, largely self run, self taught, and embedded in a larger activist community, present and preserve anarchist history in an atmosphere that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Their horizontal, group-based, decision making process represents a rejection of the formality and security found in traditional archives. In this way, many of these volunteer groups manage to embody the values of the social movement they are documenting, offering

⁸ Eric Ketelaar, "The Panoptical Archive," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 144.

us a chance to blur the line between activist and academic, between archivist and historian, and between the production and the preservation of culture.

This is important because there is currently something of a resurgence of interest in anarchist studies (a broadly defined term which is interdisciplinary in nature and incorporates both academic and independent scholars working on issues anarchist). Currently, academic networks in the UK and North America are slowly building a base of professionally-trained scholars publishing on various aspects of anarchism. Combined with the continued spread of anarchist book-fairs, publishing houses and collectives across most of the first world, it is fair to say that anarchist archives, which also often function as social gathering spaces for radical communities, will remain an expanding part of both the anarchist and academic world.

A survey of Archives:

Having produced the kind of material which these activist archives collect, and having processed archival collections of anarchist pamphlets, I have a strong affinity for these issues. As a graduate student studying archives and radical print culture, I decided to contact some of the archives I could find on the internet, as well as to explore some of the background work done by other scholars. In particular, interested readers should examine Martyn Everett's work on anarchist related archival holdings in Britain⁹ and Luigi Balamini's book on anarchist archives and centers of documentation in Italy.¹⁰

⁹ Martyn Everett, "Notes on Sources: a preliminary survey of material relating to the history of the anarchist movement in Britain" *Labor History Review* 56, no.2 (1991): 41-50.

¹⁰ Luigi Balsamini, *Fragili carte: Il movimento anarchico nelle biblioteche, archive e centri di documentazione* (Italy: editore Vecchirelli, 2009)

Besides my own personal interaction with a number of anarchist archives, I sent out 25 emails to groups who collect radical labor/anarchist material. I got a response from about half of the archives I attempted to contact, and sent them a short set of survey questions. I will be discussing various input I have received from a fair cross-section of archives with anarchist collections, including: the *Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme* (CIRA) in Switzerland, The *Working Class Movements Library* (WCML) and the *Sparrow's Nest: a Centre for Anarchist Culture and Education* (SP) in the U.K., the *Archiv Soziale Bewegungen* (ASB) in Germany, the *International Institute for Social History* (IISH) in Amsterdam, the *Biblioteca Libertaria "Armando Borghi"* (BLAB) and the *Centro Studi Libertari--Archivo Giuseppe Pinelli* (AGP) in Italy, the *Labadie Collection* at the University of Michigan, the *Federation Libertaria Argentina* (FLA) in Buenos Aires, The *Online Anarchist Archive* and the *Abalone Alliance Safe Energy Clearinghouse* (AACH) in California, and the *Anarchy Archive* in Boston.¹¹

I have asked each of these archives about several general areas of interest, including the history of their archive, the material in the archive, the training of the workers, their policy on access to the archive, general conservation issues, and their major dreams or nightmares. I told the archives that I would not directly quote their responses.¹² So, in the following section I will briefly summarize what I found out from the respondents and attempt to generalize about the overall condition of these collections.¹³

First, the history of the archives are, in general, rather similar. Most archives that are in any large part devoted to anarchist material have some form of direct connection to radical

¹¹ See appendix 1 for archival contact information.

¹² See appendix 3 for surveys approved for release by specific archives.

¹³ See appendix 2 for a sample of the survey.

social movements active during the 19th and 20th centuries. This goes for the largest and most established archive as well as the smallest and most ephemeral. For example, collections, such as the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan or the IISH Collection in Amsterdam, started out in the hands of activists. In the Labadie case, the seed came from a single individual who started the collection; this is similar to the WCML which came from a husband and wife. In the case of the IISH, the heart of the collection came from the Library of the Second International, but has been greatly expanded over the decades. The ASB in Freiberg and the AACH in San Francisco were both born during the anti-nuclear power movement of the 1980s. Both BLAB and the AGP in Italy rose out of the 1970s anarchist scene and have deep community support networks.

Different activist archives gather different kinds of material. Some function as social centers and gear their collections towards a reading audience, others collect periodicals and material objects along with manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, audio recordings, and so on. Thus, these archives face the full range of issues major archival institutions face, from a complex range of items in need of preservation to the demands of serving the public. Storage of material is clearly a major issue, and the narrative histories of the different archives often build and break around problems with location. Many of these archives have had to change buildings and cities several times, some even going underground during times of political strife. For example, BLAB dropped out of existence from the 1920s to the 1970s. Some archives spent time stored in illegally-occupied buildings along with the squatters who helped revive the anarchist traditions. Most anarchist archives still remain in environments that fail to meet archival standards.

This means that there are large collections of fragile material, from the 19th or early 20th centuries, that are stored in unstable conditions without the proper temperature or humidity control. This is a situation that demands attention from any concerned archivist or historian. I say this in no way meaning to condemn the bare-bones activist groups attempting to protect and present this material to the public. The job they face would be intimidating with training and funding, to do this work without these basics tools is a herculean task.

Fortunately, it is not a task they face alone. Many anarchist archives I contacted, or have worked with in the past, have volunteer staffs which include trained librarians or archivists. There are also often academic scholars in the community who are able to lend a hand. However, the bulk of the work is done for free, by volunteers who could always benefit from more training and newer equipment. They also often lack such basic archival supplies as acid-free folders, let alone digital scanners. This is a particular problem when it comes to archives like the ASB, which has been digitizing and organizing over 25,000 items on a shoe-string budget from the local city government.

Projects like these face the same issues concerning hardware and software standards that complicate all digitization efforts. Interestingly, there is a strong tendency within these communities to use open-source software. Both because of their cost and their transparency, these platforms mesh well with anarchist praxis. They also offer the anarchist archives a unique chance to place themselves on the forefront of emergent information technologies. This is just one area in which the anarchist archives offer educational opportunities for the larger archival community.

In general, hardware at the anarchist archives is limited. Often, copy machines are available for researchers use, although, occasionally this work is only done by a member of the staff. Ability to repair items does not really exist, although some archives are attempting to remove the staples from their pamphlets. It is also extremely rare to find complete temperature or humidity control. While most archives do attempt to address these worries, architectural and financial limitations restrict what can be done.

Funding for each archive is the second-greatest source of stress, after fear of eviction. Perhaps the two are fundamentally intertwined. Either way, the funding situation at different archives varies greatly. The Italian archives have support from a large and active community, including cooperatives which provide funds for the building maintenance. CIRA, in Switzerland, depends on voluntary donations and support from readers. However, it does have the luxury of residing in a structure built to serve as its housing. The IISH, the grandfather of radical archives, is supported by the Dutch Academy of Sciences and is in a league of its own, with a ten person, full time, trained archival staff. Several others have one or two paid positions but none compare to the IISH.

None of the other archives have anywhere near the kind of security and control practice used by the IISH. As if confirming the idea that more funding and more connection to official organizations equals more controlled use of space, the IISH follows all the protocols major state archive or private institution would follow. This has theoretical implications many people find disturbing. Eric Ketelaar comments that,

“The surveillance and discipline in archives are ingrained in the archivist’ professional distrust of anyone other than the archivist using the archives. The distrust is the psychotic shield to protect the fetish from being stained by the noninitiated. The rituals, surveillance, and discipline serve to maintain the power of the archives and the archivist.”¹⁴

Anarchists, always the ones to subvert power structures, do not follow the archival norm. Many of the more community-rooted archives are informal with their collections. For example, the ASB in Freiburg will give a key to the building to a few trusted researchers. Most of these archives do not have separate reading rooms, and some allow researchers to have direct access to the stacks. In general, there is a great deal more openness and trust in the anarchist archive community than in most professional archives, but then there is much less monetary motivation for theft and a greater community based peer-pressure preventing anti-social behavior.

In fact, many of the archives do not distinguish between academic researchers and random travelers who stop by for a visit, obviously a different situation than one finds at a place like the Huntington Library. Most of the anarchist archives receive several hundred users a year and continue accepting donations of material, despite sizable back-logs.

Several of the archives reported being part of larger archival groups of some kind, be they informal networks or official bodies such as the *Fédération internationale des centres*

¹⁴ Eric Ketelaar, “The Panoptical Archive,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 148.

*d'études et de documentation libertaires*¹⁵ and the *The International Association of Labour History Institutions* (IALHI).¹⁶ Most of these connections seem to be limited in their ability to help the archives financially, but do supply some sense of a larger professional community. Most are also connected to the large anarchist movement, for example AGP in Milan has members directly involved with preventing the eviction of another long-time anarchist community center in the city. The ASB and others have reported calling on the international anarchist community for support in times of crisis. They received money not only from local community members but from distant groups in foreign countries as well. This mutual aid potential seems largely untapped at this time.

In the end, the greatest worry that was reported to me concerned the loss of funding or rental space, and the greatest hope of the archives focused on including new people in the archival project and the increased access to collections via the internet. The drive to share their anarchist history and the stubborn refusal to give up in the face of economic and physical exhaustion makes the work of these archives inspirational and suggests that helping these archives would not only benefit historians and researchers, but the communities they hope to study. This kind of reciprocal relationship is in alignment with many of the academic values being taught in oral history and ethnography courses and presents the historian with an opportunity to address some of the problematic power-relationships which have previously existed between the researcher and the subject of study.

This also means that the large activist community, which benefits from the existence of the archives, should be mobilized to help preserve anarchist history. In this way, issues of

¹⁵ <http://ficedl.info/>

¹⁶ <http://www.ialhi.org/>

funding and people-power, along with access and preservation, can be addressed holistically; that is to say that, perhaps, the dreams of the archivists can remedy their own nightmares. Perhaps new people can be brought into the community, where they can learn from and volunteer in the archives. Perhaps anarchist organizing principles can be used to help support the anarchist archives, thus reaffirming their connection to the activist community while addressing their own individual crises. By incorporating the historians and professional archival community, an extra dimension can be added to the dialog, benefiting not only the people working to preserve source material, but the original producers of that material and the future generations who will attempt to look back and ask questions of the past.

Purposed Response, FAIL-SAFE:

With this tactic in mind, an informal group of scholars working in the burgeoning field of anarchist studies has begun discussing how to help preserve the evidence of anarchism's history. In the fall of 2009, at both the Anarchist Studies Network conference in Nottingham, England, and the inaugural conference of the North American Anarchist Studies Network in Hartford, Connecticut, work being done on translation, digitization, and preservation of archival material and historic monuments was put forward as the basis for a future working group. As of now, several scholars, including myself, have taken up the acronym FAIL-SAFE as a moniker for this project. Somewhat humorously called the Federation of Archivists and International Librarians Saving Anarchism's Forgotten Evidence, the group is going to be proposed at the January Los Angeles Anarchist Book-fair. A web page is also possibly going to be launched this spring.

The idea of FAIL-SAFE is not to start a centralized organization bent on maintaining a canon of anarchist literature or an official anarchist history, but rather to build an organic network of trained library professionals, anarchist studies researchers, volunteer archivists, and general anarchist activists. By involving printers, publishers, historians, archivists, and anarchist organizers in a mutual-aid network, a productive synergy can be produced which benefits everyone involved. Volunteer energy and archival skills can be exchanged using the social networks which already exist throughout the international anarchist community and require little bureaucratic overhead or financial capital. This would mean actively putting forward archival issues for discussion at the many anarchist book-fairs, conferences, and convergences which the activist community already uses to support itself and spread its base.

FAIL-SAFE would need to access the support of the larger activist community, which would mean making the material in the archives seem relevant to activists. The potential here is demonstrated by the Istituto de Martino and the Circolo Gianni Bosio, one of the largest oral history centers in Italy and an archive for dissident groups including anarchists, nonorthodox Marxists and religious utopists. For them,

“music was a vehicle that helped generate public use of the collection through records and concerts. The archive is not a separate institution where tapes are held in custody but rather a wheel within wheels of cultural, artistic, and political creation and organization ranging from concerts to record production to scholarly research to grass-roots organizing.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Alessandro Portelli, “Lookin’ for a Home: independent oral history archives in Italy,” in *Archives*,

As long as the archive remains solely a place for academics, the activist community which supports groups like FoodNotBombs or the Anarchist Black Cross (both with similar structures as the purposed FAIL-SAFE) are unlikely to throw any benefit concerts. The Instituto de Martino, on the other hand, shows us what is possible if we bridge the chasm between the archivist and anarchist communities.

If the huge amount of cultural material stored in the archive is allowed to re-energize the anarchist community (if the art, the poems, the propaganda and the lessons of the past can find their way off the shelves and into the contemporary movement), then both the archives and the anarchists (especially the anarchist publishing houses) will benefit. Since most of the material is free of copyright laws, and because the anarchists have a long tradition of reprinting old tracts, this means that the archives are also sitting on top of one of their best possible means of financial support. In the case of the Instituto de Ernesto Martino, "the institute generated a network of organization and projects that included a record label... (and) a publishing outfit... these groups were instrumental in creating the independent and antiburecratic spirit... that led to the 1968-69 uprising."¹⁸ Creating such symbiotic relationships between archives and activists should be the goal of FIAL-SAFE.

Finally, while there are some loose networks of radical archives, the association between groups usually remains at the archive level. By purposing FAIL-SAFE, we would not be rebuilding an existing network, but, rather calling for a federation of individuals with an affinity

Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 222.

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, "Lookin' for a Home: independent oral history archives in Italy," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 220.

to all things archival. This would include people with all the skills necessary to maintain and run one of these projects. FAIL-SAFE would seek to connect the archives with people who have backgrounds in areas as far ranging as art conservation to air-conditioner repair, computer programming to electric wiring, archival appraisal to historic analysis, publishing to throwing benefit concerts. The more the producers of anarchist history, the preservers of that history, and the consumers of that history know and support each other, the better.

Also, all the various projects that the interwoven community of anarchists, archivists, and researchers are involved with will be better off the sooner we all can address the current crisis in conservation and access in the anarchist archives. It is not likely that FAIL-SAFE will grow into a large federation with a great population of card-carrying members. However, it could help the already existing community of anarchist archivists and researchers become more self-aware, it could help make more people conscious of the anarchist archives (at least within the anarchist community) and it could help the archives survive, or at least acquire acid-free folders.

There has been talk of expanding such a project to include support for such traditional anarchist sites as the graves of Emma Goldman and the Haymarket Martyrs in Chicago and the Anarchist/Socialist Labor Hall in Barre Vermont. Also, the ashes of some famous anarchist remain in the possession of various governmental institutions. Work being done to reacquire these figures' imprisoned remains. All these projects suggest ways in which a project like FAIL-SAFE could do productive work.

Conclusion:

Archives remain a hot topic in the academy, and for good reason. They also remain a vital part of any social movement, just as they are a vital part of any political party and any corporation. However, the anarchist archives face a unique set of problems due to their exclusion from the economic and the political system. Yet, they remain rich in social and cultural capital and as such are capable of drawing on centuries of print material and an international community of dedicated volunteers. These are conditions that we should embrace. The potential for unlocking community support and for releasing the educational power of the archives is, in some ways, stunning. Of course, the work to get there is also monumental and the labor of these dedicated archivists should not go unnoticed.

Since the end of the cold war, interest in the anarchists has steadily increased. Both in terms of a lived political movement and as a subject of academic study, the anarchists remain alive despite all that they have suffered. Most historians and archivists are aware of the link between remembered history and possible futures. Most activists are aware of the tactical and strategic lessons that the past has to offer anyone involved large-scale social conflict. For me, at least, the idea of allowing the rich record of the anarchist movement to slowly be lost to time is simply unacceptable. My research into the international anarchist archives suggest that there are many other people out there who would agree.

Appendix 1:

Contact info for the Anarchist Archives

The *Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme* (CIRA)

- CIRA, Avenue de Beaumont 24, CH-1012 Lausanne, Suisse.
- Email: cira@plusloin.org
- <http://www.cira.ch/home>

The *Working Class Movements Library* (WCML)

- 51 The Crescent, Salford, U.K. M5 4WX, 0161 7363601
- <http://www.wcml.org.uk/>

The *Sparrow's Nest: a Centre for Anarchist Culture and Education* (SP)

- <http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk>
- Email: info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk

The *Archiv Soziale Bewegungen* (ASB)

- Adlerstraße 12, 79098 Freiburg
- www.soziologie.uni-freiburg.de/asb

A.D.Hoyt

- Email: ArchivSozialeBewegungen@gmx.de

The *International Institute for Social History* (IISH)

- Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- P.O. Box 2169, 1000 CD Amsterdam.
- Email: info@iisg.nl
- <http://www.iisg.nl/index.php>

The *Biblioteca Libertaria "Armando Borghi"* (BLAB)

- Via Emilia Interna, 93/95, I - 48014 Castel Bolognese (RA), Italia
- Email: biblioteca.borghi@racine.ra.it

The *Centro Studi Libertari--Archivo Giuseppe Pinelli* (AGP)

- Via Rovetta 27, Milano, MI, 20127, Italy
- Email: centrostudi@centrostudilibertari.it
- <http://www.centrostudilibertari.it/index.php/home.html>

The *Labadie Collection*

- 7th Floor, Hatcher Graduate Library, 913 S. University Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109

A.D.Hoyt

- Email: jherrada@umich.edu

The Federation Libertaria Argentina (FLA)

- Brasil 1551, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Email: fla2@radar.com.ar
- <http://www.libertario.org.ar/home.html>

The Online Anarchist Archive

- Email: dward@pitzer.edu
- http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/index.html

The Abalone Alliance Safe Energy Clearinghouse (AACH)

- 2940 16th Street #310, San Francisco, CA 94103.
- Email: abalone@energy-net.org
- <http://www.energy-net.org/>

The Anarchy Archive Project

- P.O. Box 381323 Cambridge, MA 02238-1323 USA

Appendix 2:

Sample of Survey Sent to Anarchist Archives

Survey of Archival Methods

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to survey current archival practice amongst a variety of groups currently preserving, studying, and making historic anarchist material available. This will include University and State Archives with special collections centered on labor and radical history, but will focus on activist and volunteer archives.

Intent:

This research is not intended for publication, but for Graduate level course work in Archival Studies. This interest rises out of my own work with archival material as a historian. I am currently working on Dana Ward's online project:

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu:16080/Anarchist_Archives/index.html.

Questions:

Please take as much space as you need to answer these questions. This is informal and you will not be quoted directly. I am an archival student working with anarchist material and I simply want to know how you do what you do, what kind of material you have, what are you proud of and what issues frustrate you, etc. Pretend we are simply sitting down and talking over coffee.

- *History of the Archive:* How was it started? Has it shifted locations? How has it changed over time, how is it supported, etc?
- *Material:* What is the topical focus and geographic/historic range of the collection/s? What is the provenance? Are there manuscripts, objects, photographs or non-print items?
- *The Workers:* Who works in the archive? When is it open, are people paid or volunteer, are they professionally trained? Is there a backlog of work to be done; are there too many or not enough people to handle the archive's workload, etc?

- *Access:* What kind of finding aids are used? How are the items cataloged? Are items digitized or available online, is photocopying available on site? How many outside scholars use the collection annually, what is the reading room like, is the archive connected to other activist archives?
- *Conservation:* How is the collection stored? Are temperature and humidity monitored? Are there security precautions, do readers have access to the stacks? Does the archive own the building; is the building prepared for natural disasters? Do you do repair items, are items in folders, are they stored in acid-free containers? How are photos stored, are staples or tape removed from items, etc?
- *Dreams:* What would you change about the way the archive is run, in what direction would you like to see the archive go? What projects excite you? If you had funding what would your first priority be?
- *Nightmares:* What bothers you most about the situation, what issues does the physical condition of the archive raise? What problems do you find yourself worrying about?
- *Help:* How can the slowly growing community of anarchist scholars and activists help your archive? What kind of resources do you most need? Does the archive do outreach work or attempt to connect with activists or other people who might be supportive of its project?

Please feel free to answer any or all of the questions above as you see fit. My sole purpose is to get a sense of where we are at, internationally, as keepers of anarchist history.

Hopefully a snapshot of the larger community will help me determine how I can best contribute to the important project of preserving the physical remains of our past.

Feel free to contact me if you have any more questions,

Andrew.hoyt@cgu.edu

Andrew Hoyt

Appendix 3:

Survey answers from select archives

Centro Studi Libertari - Archivio Giuseppe Pinelli

In 1976, during preparations for an international conference on the «grand old man» of anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin, an idea was conceived. This idea was to transform the work undertaken for this event into a sustained project, and thus to create a permanent cultural point of reference. Once conceived, this idea very soon came to fruition. The opening of that conference (Venice, September 1976) saw the announcement of the birth of the Centro Studi Libertari G. Pinelli.

The Center is founded on two ideas. On the one hand, it is an archive in which the memory of anarchism (both written and unwritten) can be preserved through the collection of newspapers, issues of periodicals, books, manuscripts and other materials that had been widely dispersed because of historical and personal events.

On the other, it seeks to contribute to the development of a distinctively libertarian cultural milieu that can provide a creative, forthright and lucid critique of the all-pervasive culture of domination.

We feel that the development of such a milieu means, above all, the restoration of the historical significance and cultural wealth that was so evident in anarchism's past. We also feel that it should be recognized today as the most advanced and coherent theory and practice of human freedom; that is, as the most thorough critique of all forms of domination.

The anarchism to which we refer is less a political movement than a cultural «tradition»: an amalgam of ideas, intellectual and existential initiatives, and personal and collective histories.

This anarchism is a source of both meaning and direction; it is a way of looking at the world and a willingness to transform it. Its fundamental values are freedom, equality, diversity and solidarity (of which freedom is, on grounds of both reason and emotion, *primus inter pares*). It is a cultural tradition that, while requiring a certain logical coherence based on its axiological foundations, is, by definition, anti-dogmatic and open to comparison, innovation and experimentation.

The conferences, seminars, research and other initiatives undertaken by the Center over the decades have undertaken a reconsideration of anarchism's historical «roots». Even more, they have sought to create a contemporary libertarian imaginary: an analysis and fruitful consideration of the «here and now» in the light of an ethical and aesthetic «elsewhere». This adventure has brought us many companions – both long-term and occasional – who have arrived from all parts of the world, not only from the various tendencies of anarchism itself but also from other more or less related cultural areas.

In the meantime, the Center's library has been enriched by the acquisition of thousands of volumes (mostly in Italian, but also in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German). It can now boast a virtually complete collection of Italian-language books and leaflets on anarchist history and thought and on libertarian movements, as well as a complete collection of the most important Italian periodicals and single issues, in the original or on microfilm. Since 1978 the CSL has belonged to the FICEDL, a European body which acts as a coordinator of archives and libertarian study centres. In 1986 the two basic functions of the Center - its historical documentary role and that of a more general promotor of culture have been formally divided, thus giving rise to the two names: the *Archivio Giuseppe Pinelli* and the *Centro Studi Libertari*.

Biblioteca Libertaria “Armando Borghi” - Castel Bolognese

History

In 1916 a group of young anarchists founded a libertarian library hosted in the Anarchist “Circolo Anarchico” of Castel Bolognese. The library worked up to the rise of fascism.

In 1973 three comrades who participated into the founding of the first library, together with the new generation of anarchists, re-organized a new libertarian library in the house owned by Aurelio Lolli, one of the founders.

Since 1985 the library is owned and administrated by a cooperative of 22 comrades. Four of them live in Castel Bolognese, others live in Imola, Forlì, Ravenna and Bologna.

The members from Imola are members of ASFAl (Historical Archive of the Italian Anarchist Federation) that is based in Imola. This town is only 10 km far from Castel Bolognese, so we have two anarchist archives very close.

The buildings of our library were enlarged and renewed in 2006.

The cooperative supports the financial cost of the library.

Material

The library focuses on the history of the thought and of the anarchist and libertarian movements, history of the trade-union and workers movement, history of the political and social movements as well as thought, anti-militarism, anti-clericalism, pedagogy, sociology and economy. We are specialized on Armando Borghi (Castel Bolognese 1882 – Roma 1968), leader of USI (Italian anarchist trade-union), and on local anarchists.

The material mostly comes from donations by friends and comrades, and part of it comes from Italian emigrants. Part of the material is reproduced from the originals preserved in historical archives.

The library owns about 7000 books, 800 reviews, audio and video recordings, posters, photographs, a few paintings and memorabilia.

The reviews are mostly from Italy, but also from France, UK, Spain, Portugal, South America and USA.

A.D.Hoyt

The reviews dates back to 1880.

We preserve several funds: Armando Borghi's archive, Luce and Luigi Fabbri's archive, Nello Garavini, Domenico Girelli, Gianpiero Landi, Giuseppe Mascii, Emma Neri Garavini, Organizzazione Anarchica Forlivese, Leda Rafanelli, Maria Rossi Molaschi, Aldo Venturini, including documents on Saverio Merlino. The library also preserves (but does not own it) the Professor Carlo Doglio's archive.

Workers

The workers are volunteers, partially trained. Part of the catalogues are organized by professionals, supported by public regional institution for library preserve.

We have plenty of work ongoing, mainly since the renovation of the buildings.

Access

Items are partially catalogued and available on the on-line national librarian system (<http://opac.provincia.ra.it/SebinaOpac/Opac>).

The reviews are also on the on-line national catalogue of reviews (<http://acnp.cib.unibo.it>).

The library is open to the public for 12 hours per week. We have a photocopier .

Currently we have three people writing PhD theses and Master theses on Professor Carlo Doglio, whose fund we host. Other few students consult regularly our library.

The library has two rooms open to the public and one for the archive (about 100m2) (not to mention a large cave still to be renovated).

The library participates in the FICEDL.

Conservation

The rooms are heated in winter and warm all year long, without humidity.

A.D.Hoyt

We have a few security precautions: fire extinguisher in every rooms. Readers have access to the stacks. The archive owns the building. We have to face additional work in order to encounter earthquake-proof standards for security.

Items are mainly inside folders. We aim to put all items in folders. A few documents are stored in acid-free folders.

We are removing staples from documents. Photos are not yet organized. A few are digitalized.

Nightmares

Earthquakes and floods. We plan to reinforce the buildings foundation. The building dates back to 1700.

Help

We are taking part in the project of putting all the catalogues of the FICEDL libraries on-line in a common database.

We need time and people to accomplish the work.

We look for financial support, and we held events to raise funds.

Free to ask additional questions.

For further information that may be of help in forming a snapshot of the Italian anarchist archives, you may browse a recent book on Italian anarchist archives:

Balsamini Luigi

“Fragili carte. Il movimento anarchico nelle biblioteche, archivi e centri di documentazione”

Editore Vecchierelli 2009.

You may contact the author at: luigibalsamini@libero.it

Abalone Alliance Safe Energy Clearinghouse

Thanks for the enquiry. Sadly, I've stopped major work on my archival work due to health as well as an antiquated storage format.

The original design structure of the energy-net archives was based on the Fidonet BBS system from the mid to late 1980's. A series of basic programs was written in the mid 90's to identify content by subject and geographical region. The original purpose of the archives was on anti-nuclear materials but was soon expanded to other content. The primary source of news prior to 1998 were services like Peacenet and Newshound, which both died in October in 1998. After 911 new content was setup via a direct alt.progressive feed. Several hundred stories per day were archived up until the spring of 2008 when my health and time ran out to maintain the larger old system. Since then, I've shifted to a social bookmarking combination of diigo and del.icio.us and have only kept track of a much smaller group of nuclear news content. During the summer of 2009 the library came under attack with verbal and direct attacks to both the blog and the library. The library has been locked and the blog repaired after months of problems and is now back.

I'm an ex-Vietnam veteran, with older computer skills (mainframe and ancient programming) that I dropped out of after service. I maintained a small ships computer library as well as their physical library. There have been several attempts to expand and connect with the Culture Change blog (anti-paving -culture collapse) group, sadly the core person recently had to move to Portland to survive.

However, the primary library I care for is not online or on a computer, but is the old library and files of the anti-nuclear movement's northern California office that dates from the 1970's to mid 80's. Most of those documents are still only available in paper and include around 10 file cabinets of documents, with about 2 of them unique to the Abalone Alliance.

Working-Class Movements Library

- *History of the Archive:*
The collection began life as the personal collection of Ruth and Eddie Frow. A history of the library is available at <http://www.wcml.org.uk/about-us/ruth-and-eddie/>
- *Material:* The material covers over 200 years of organising and campaigning by ordinary men and women for social and political progress. We hold books, pamphlets, archives, photographs, objects, badges, banners, ceramics. See the introduction to our collection for more details <http://www.wcml.org.uk/contents/>

A large part of the collection is the personal collection of Ruth and Eddie Frow. All the other items have been donated to us by individuals and organizations (especially trade unions).

- *The Workers:* Staff (paid): There is one full time Library Manager and one part time Library Assistant. Until Dec 2010 there are 3 full time project posts paid for by the Heritage Lottery Fund (1 archivist, 1 librarian and 1 learning co-ordinator). All staff are professionally trained.

Volunteers (unpaid): we generally have about 20-30 volunteers, who do different jobs around the Library (assisting with cataloguing, sorting records, welcoming visitors and other jobs).

The Library is open Tuesday-Friday 10.00am-5.00pm and one Saturday a month 10.00am-4.00pm

There is a backlog of cataloguing. (The Heritage Lottery Fund project is dealing with a large part of this, but there will still be a lot to do after the project ends).

- *Access:* The archives are being catalogued onto a piece of cataloguing software called Adlib and this is available as an online catalogue on our website. <http://www.wcml.org.uk/catalogue/adlib-catalogue/>

The archives are catalogued to conform to ISAD:G (International Standard of Archival Description: general).

Images of some of our objects are available on the online catalogue (banners and framed items). We have also just started a project to digitize our large photographic collection. We also digitize some documents on an ad hoc basis.

We have about 300-350 people visiting the Library to do research a year and we have a lot more visiting for exhibitions, tours and open days and events. Photocopying is available on site.

We are not formally connected to any other activist archives, but we do advise people where to go to access other activist collections and we do have contact with other activist archives around the country such as the Peoples' History Museum, Manchester.

- *Conservation:* The building is made up of many small rooms over 4 levels (it used to be a home for district nurses and a children's' home). All archival material apart from volumes are stored in acid free boxes. Delicate items are placed in Melinex pockets (non plastic, acid free, see through). The temperature and humidity are monitored but none of the rooms are environmentally controlled. Readers do not have access to the material (It is brought to them in the reading room).

The building is owned by the Local Council (Salford City Council). We have a disaster plan for the Library.

We do not repair items as we do not have any conservation facilities or a trained conservator. We do send a selection of items to a conservator when funds are available. If an item is in need of repair we try to keep it in such a condition that it won't deteriorate anymore until it can be repaired. Staples and tape are not removed from items as this can cause more damage to the item than the staple or tape is causing.

- *Dreams:* In an ideal world a new, purpose built repository and more permanent staff (archivists, librarians and learning officers).
- *Nightmares:* As with most archives lack of funding is a huge problem.
- *Help:* We need funding the most, but volunteers' time and effort are also invaluable to us. The archive is doing a lot of outreach work in schools, adult learning and the local community as part of the project but this will be difficult to maintain once the

project has ended, with the reduction in staff numbers. We do some outreach work on the Web (on our website and we have a blog and a facebook page and have a subscription newsletter).

Archiv Soziale Bewegungen

- *History of the Archive:* The archive was founded in the early 80s from leftist members of the anti nuclear power movement and the then very active squatter movement. Starting point was a then published critique of the peace movement from an antimilitaristic viewpoint. While assembling this critique the members of these groups discovered that it wasn't very easy to gather authentic publications from the history of the peace movement, so the idea was born to found an archive of the social movements. The first task was to determine some sort of catalogue, the so called "Systematik", which should serve to bring the materials in an order to make it usable for the prospective users of the archive. Then the users were primarily thought of as members of the movements themselves, who wanted to learn for their current struggles from the past. The first rooms were in the so called "Spechtpassage", an old coal merchant's premises, which was bought by members of the squatters movement and where there was already a book shop, a café, a print shop etc. There it remained for nearly 20 years, although the actual rooms changed sometimes. But the archive kept growing and there wasn't enough room at the Spechtpassage, so the archive moved to the "Grethersche Fabrik" - a similar project like the Spechtpassage, but with more space for the archive. The users changed heavily from the days of the beginning. From members of the movements themselves it shifted to students of the university (which often had a background in the movements), first undergraduates, then in an increasingly number to graduate students, postgraduates and professors. Most of the current users have now a scholarly background, and they do not just come from the local university but also from other parts of Germany or abroad. Financing is very tough. Approximately two thirds of our meagre budget are provided by the City of Freiburg, the rest by donations, funded projects and some sales.
- *Material:* We collect leaflets, flyers, magazines, brochures, posters, photos, audio tapes and films from the history of independent sozial movements after the second world war in the region of Baden (the south east corner of Germany). There are some exceptions from this regionalism: Brochues and magazines are not limited to Baden, to provide a broader context for the other materials. We do not collect books and we do not collect materials from political parties. We get most of the material in our collection from members of the movements themselves. Since we have a good reputation most materials are provided by the activists themselves, but in recent years we have begun actively to seek out known activists and ask them for their treasures. We have manuscripts (mostly protocols of meetings, but also some

diaries) and are starting to build a collection of photographs in digitized form.

- *The Workers:* At the moment there is one (meagerly) paid person who does most of the day to day tasks. He is supported by volunteers – at the time being there are three constantly active volunteers. None of us has a formal training as archivist. (That is not completely true: One of us who is at the moment not active, because he lives in Berlin, not in Freiburg has meanwhile had official training as an archivist – we hope he will return soon to Freiburg.) The archive is officially open two days a week (Wednesday from 10 am to 3pm and Thursday from 11 am to 6pm). But it is also possible to make appointments or just try your luck on the other days, because most of the time there will be someone there on the other days. The workload? There is always more work to be done than all of us can handle, so we have to make compromises.
- *Access:* As mentioned above there is the infamous “Systematik”. You will find it on the internet at <http://www.soziologie.uni-freiburg.de/asb/systematik/systindex.html>. It is build up like a tree. At the root you have approximately twenty movements like students movement, womens lib, squatters etc. Each of this points is subdivided in subpoints, the subpoints again and so on until you reach such a fine granularity that a point corresponds to a folder in the shelves. So it is easy to find what you are looking for. Magazines and brochures are catalogued in a database. You may also find them under <http://www.soziologie.uni-freiburg.de/asb/zeitsch/index.html> and <http://www.soziologie.uni-freiburg.de/asb/brosch/index.html>. We do a lot of digitizing. At the moment, I think, there are approximately 25000 digitized items in our own Alexandria database. We use this database to create CDs to special themes and sell them, which supports the archive. We have approximately 200 visitors a year, from local students to postgraduates from the USA or Japan. The reading room is, well, nice. I don't know, what exactly you want to know. It is possible to work for up to 6 people simultaneously, there are also two computers for the users to access digitized materials. We regularly try to attend the “Workshop der Archive von unten”, a biannual meeting of activist archives in Berlin (it is hosted be the Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, the party archive of Die Grünen – the green party). We also have some loose connections to some anarchist archives in France.
- *Conservation:* In cardbox folders. Monitoring temperature and humidity? Are you kidding? That's way beyond our budget. There are no strict security precautions, but we ask the users not to go to the shelves themselves, but ask one of us to give him or her, what he or she wants. That does not apply to scholars who work for some week or months, these may, if we trust them, serve themselves. Sometimes, if we feel, we can really trust such a person, we will give them a key to the archive, so they can work if nobody of us is there.
- *Dreams:* That's difficult to say. We fight with so much underfunding that we didn't dare to

dream in the last years. First thing, if we had the money, we would probably pay decent wages. Next there are a lot of digitizing projects that are kept on hold. We would like to publish a lot more CDs or DVDs with material from our collections. And yes, I for my part would like to do a lot more research than just keeping the archive going.

- *Nightmares:* Biggest nightmare is that the City of Freiburg is withdrawing their support (like they threatened some years ago). Just from donations we wouldn't even be able to afford the rent – the archive now occupies three stories. And it wouldn't be able to survive in a decent fashion if we couldn't afford to pay at least one person for the work.

Help: I don't know. When the City threatened to cut our funds we could mobilize quite some people not alone in Freiburg but also abroad (especially in the USA) to send letters to the mayor, which helped somewhat. We had to suffer a severe cut in the funds, but the funding was not abolished altogether. Such kind of support may be helpful. But the resources we need most are young people who are interested in what we are doing and who want to keep up what we have started. I am 45 now and I am clearly the youngest of the current activists. So the biggest problem we will face apart from funding in the next 10 to 20 years is to find successors.

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