

Collecting, Describing and Exhibiting: Provenance, Context, and Original Title at the Field Museum of Natural History, 1893-1996

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This paper explores how core principles of archives and museums -- provenance, context, and original title -- are applied within particular historical contexts and how, in their applications, they show themselves to be historically dependent constructs. At three moments in time, the theories of evolution, race, and culture area shape those principles in ways that fundamentally mold the museum's collections, interpretations, and displays of Native Americans and their objects at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. For many archivists, it has almost become an unchallenged article of faith mysteriously reaching into distant history or the French Revolution and unknown French, German or Dutch scholars that the above principles are imbued with significance and fundamentally immutable. But when these assumptions are challenged in the course of a work day, we tend to find it difficult to explain in detail why these are actually significant on the ground, in our mundane labors of appraising, arranging, describing, exhibiting and shaping history. Studying the scientific paradigm of evolution at the founding of the museum in 1894, the politically virulent/opportune theories of race at the museum's famous and gigantic *Hall of Races* in 1933, and the long legacy of the presumably innocuous concept of culture area from the 1930s to the 1990s allows us brief glimpses into how theories, vagaries of funding, personalities involved and other factors known to inform social reality and history, shape the application of these principles and hence what museums and archives do.

About the author:

Susanne Belovari is the Archivist for Reference and Collections, Digital Collections and Archives (DCA), Tufts University. Prior to DCA, she worked as Holocaust restitution historian and archivist for the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria, where she also coordinated archives projects with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Central Archives of the History of Jewish Peoples in Jerusalem. Susanne is on the board of the International Council on Archives – Section of University and Research Institution Archives, acting editor of the ICA-SUV newsletter and serves on a number of SUV committees. Susanne Belovari has presented at regional, national, and international conferences (Brazil, Scotland, England, Iceland, Poland) and has published on international archival issues, history of archives, food and culinary history before and under National Socialism, and processing 'archives under siege' among other topics. Her academic background is in international development, Latin American Studies, the history of colonialism, and the history of science, with a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, Urbana, and a Post-Doctoral Research Associate at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Susanne Belovari participated at the second *Archives Leadership Institute* at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2009 and was awarded the *New England Archivists' Richard W. Hale, Jr. Professional Development Award 2007*.