

Risk Management: How Will Archivists Function Once Reading Cursive Disappears?

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Given socio-cultural changes including: i) significant decline in emphasis on teaching cursive writing in elementary schools, ii) Young adults in 2022 who cannot read cursive and growing grandparental disappointment about their grandchildren's inability to read cursive, iii) young people's inability to perform unique signatures, iv) custodial archival institution looming challenge in finding new staff members who have cursive reading skills, and v) future archive users who will be cursive illiterate, is anybody thinking about how to cope with this kind of future in archives?

The proposer heard from one institution that it is transcribing handwritten diaries--even before digitising. Is it not worrisome that archives as well as history professors, governments, and other interested parties are not considering how handwritten cursive archival records can remain accessible once reading cursive records is no longer included in elementary school curricula and those who are cursive literate 'age out' of our business?

Other than concerns surrounding the loss of the benefits of cursive practice to child mental and physical development, there seems to be little or no apprehension about the obvious negative future implications for the values of archival cursive holdings, much less archivists' and historians' ability to read handwritten records.

This presentation will address issues surrounding cursive writing and reading illiteracy that have a critical impact on how custodial archival institutions will be able to find new staff members who have been taught cursive writing and reading skills as well as suggest possible solutions to prevent archival holdings in cursive writing formats from becoming irrelevant to new generations of archivists and users. Potential answers to the cursive literacy dilemma will be raised and a challenge issued to university archival training programmes, professional archival organisations, archive line workers, and governments to start thinking about and preparing for maintaining future accessibility to cursive format documents.

See <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-archives-history-function-once-reading-cursive-paul-c-thistle/>

About the author:

Paul C. Thistle (M.A., B.Ed., B.A., Museology Cert.), has 26+ years of mission and management work in museum/archive institutions. After some archival professional development courses and an internship at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, he also has arranged and described archival records to RAD standards (including on contract), supervised archival contract workers, and served on the boards of professional museum and archives associations. He has made several presentations to these organisations' training events and also taught Native Studies at the university level as well as Museum Studies at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Paul has published articles in periodicals such as *Curator*, *Muse*, *Journal of Museum Education*,

Material Culture: The Journal of the Pioneer America Society, as well as one republished in *Care of Collections: Leicester Readers in Museum Studies*, and others in the field of Indigenous history including a national, provincial, and academic award winning book. Since 1990, Paul has been researching and writing about the overwork culture in the museum field that employs “occupational devotees” who love their work and, as a result, overwork—a close parallel to archive paid and volunteer staff. Paul currently blogs on *Solving Task Saturation for Museum Workers*, *Critical Museology Miscellanea*, and his western fur trade ethnohistory book web site.