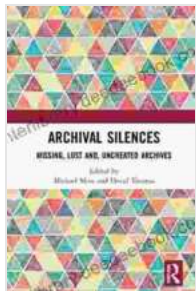


# Archival Silences: Missing, Lost, and Uncreated Archives

Archives are not simply repositories of historical documents. They are also sites of power and knowledge production, where decisions are made about what gets preserved and what gets forgotten.

As a result, there are many silences in the archives. These silences can be caused by a variety of factors, including:



## Archival Silences: Missing, Lost and, Uncreated

**Archives** by Francesca Polletta

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
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- **Intentional destruction:** Documents can be destroyed for a variety of reasons, including political, religious, or personal. For example, the Nazis destroyed many Jewish records during the Holocaust.
- **Accidental destruction:** Documents can also be destroyed by natural disasters, such as fires, floods, and earthquakes. For example, the Great Fire of Chicago in 1871 destroyed many city records.

- **Neglect:** Documents can also be lost or damaged due to neglect. For example, many local government records have been lost due to inadequate storage conditions.
- **Censorship:** Governments and other powerful institutions can censor documents to suppress information that they do not want the public to see. For example, the US government has censored documents related to the assassination of John F. Kennedy.
- **Unrecorded history:** Some events and experiences are simply not recorded in the archives. This is often the case for marginalized groups, such as women, people of color, and the poor.

These silences in the archives have a profound impact on our understanding of the past. They can lead us to overlook important events and experiences, and to misinterpret the history of our world.

It is important to be aware of the silences in the archives and to consider the reasons why they exist. Only then can we begin to fill in the gaps in our knowledge and to create a more complete understanding of our history.

## **Missing Archives**

Missing archives are archives that have been lost or destroyed, either intentionally or accidentally. The loss of an archive can be a devastating blow to historical research, as it can deprive scholars of valuable information about the past.

There are many reasons why archives can go missing. Some archives are destroyed by natural disasters, such as fires or floods. Others are

destroyed by war or political upheaval. Still others are simply lost or misplaced.

The loss of an archive can have a profound impact on our understanding of the past. For example, the loss of the Library of Alexandria in the 4th century AD deprived scholars of a vast repository of knowledge about the ancient world.

In some cases, missing archives can be recovered. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1940s and 1950s after being lost for over 2,000 years.

However, many missing archives are never recovered. This can lead to a significant loss of historical information, and make it difficult for scholars to reconstruct the past.

## **Lost Archives**

Lost archives are archives that have been forgotten or misplaced. Unlike missing archives, lost archives are not necessarily gone forever. They may simply be in a place where no one has thought to look for them.

There are many reasons why archives can become lost. Some archives are lost due to neglect. Others are lost due to changes in ownership or location. Still others are lost due to simple human error.

The loss of an archive can be a frustrating experience for scholars. It can be difficult to know where to start looking for a lost archive, and it can be even more difficult to find it.

However, the discovery of a lost archive can be a major breakthrough for historical research. For example, the discovery of the Vinland Map in the 1960s provided new evidence for the Norse exploration of North America.

The search for lost archives is an ongoing process. Scholars are constantly looking for new ways to find and recover lost archives. As new technologies are developed, it is becoming increasingly likely that more lost archives will be found.

## **Uncreated Archives**

Uncreated archives are archives that have never existed. These archives contain records of events or experiences that have been unrecorded or undocumented.

There are many reasons why an archive might never be created. Some events or experiences are simply not considered to be important enough to record. Others are considered to be too sensitive or controversial to be recorded.

The lack of an archive can have a profound impact on our understanding of the past. For example, the lack of an archive of the experiences of enslaved people in the United States makes it difficult for scholars to reconstruct the history of slavery.

In some cases, uncreated archives can be created retroactively. For example, the WPA Slave Narrative Collection was created in the 1930s to document the experiences of former slaves. However, many uncreated archives will never be created, and the information they contain will be lost forever.

Archival silences are a reminder of the fragility of our historical record. They can lead us to overlook important events and experiences, and to misinterpret the history of our world.

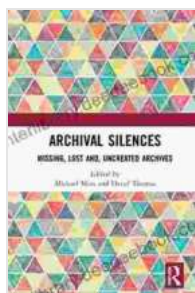
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### Related Articles

- The Importance of Archives
- The Challenges of Archival Research
- How to Find Lost Archives

### Further Reading

- *The Archival Imagination* by Samuel Edgerton
- *Archives and the Public Good* by Terry Cook
- *Memory, History, and Archives* by Annette Wieviorka



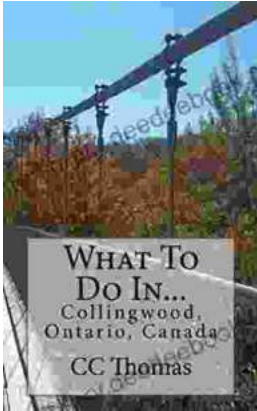
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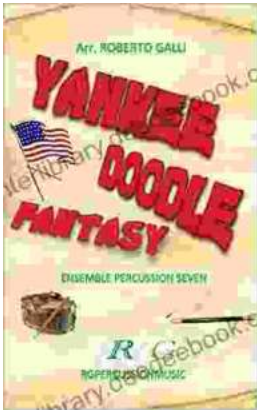
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