Renée M. Sentilles

Toiling in the Archives of Cyberspace

IF AN ARCHIVE IS A REPOSITORY of documents, the World Wide Web has the potential to become a collection of those repositories: an archive of archives, if you will. As a busy teacher and scholar, I embrace the idea of using my home computer to do primary research. The Internet is a wonderful research tool. But if electronic mediums are touted as having the potential to *replace* traditional archives, rather than simply to enhance older methods of research, I would argue that such a thing is simply not possible. In this essay I investigate the tension between the speed and quantity of Web sources on the one hand and the comparative slowness and dearth of resources in traditional archives on the other. The Web can serve as an archive in a loose sense of the word: a place where scholars can go to search through collections of information. But, as companion essays in this text suggest, archives are about much more than a physical gathering of artifacts under one roof, and limitations can be a powerful source of inspiration. Our relationship with sources changes as they become more accessible, more abundant, and less tangible.

Let me begin by clarifying what I mean and do not mean by the term "Internet" and its source material. My understanding is that "World Wide Web" refers to all web sites accessible by the Internet, which acts as a highway system. Technically, that would make each web site an archive, the World Wide Web the archive of those archives, and the Internet a transportation device. Such rigid boundaries break down quickly, however, because most computer users do not distinguish the Internet from the World Wide Web. Thus, as is now common in speech, in this essay I am going to use "World Wide Web," "the Web," and the "Internet" as synonyms for the archives of cyberspace accessed through computers. These electronic repositories contain primary and secondary sources, and both may be digitized (appearing exactly as they appeared on the original

printed page, as if one had taken a picture of that page) or rewritten, so that the wording is the same but the physical structure of the words has changed. Digitized materials are far more useful because (to a limited degree) one can examine the publication in which the artifact appears. They are also more trustworthy since scholars can safely assume that no language has changed in the process of being transformed into an electronic medium. Digitized materials are abundant in subscribed databases, but not so commonly found online. For the purposes of this essay, I am assuming researchers will rely on a mix of material, most of which is not digitized. Because there are many Web archives placed by enthusiasts, I am also writing as if researchers are using sites maintained by individuals as well as by institutions.

My own experience researching and writing a cultural biography on the Civil War actress and poet Adah Isaacs Menken speaks directly to how the development of Internet archives is affecting scholarship. I had been using e-mail since 1996, and regularly relied on research databases like World Cat and American History and Life, but it was 2000 before I actually did any research on the Internet. Up to that point, I had used the Internet to *prepare* to visit traditional archives, but never to retrieve actual material. In my world the idea of reading books and articles online still sounded like scary science fiction (people spoke of *doing away* with books, which I think only people who do not like to read would find the least bit appealing). For me, discovering Google.com changed everything.

I had just mailed my revised manuscript to the publisher when I was introduced to Google, so of course the first words I typed in were "Adah Isaacs Menken." I was truly shocked when 271 web sites featuring Menken popped up on the screen. At that point I knew more about Menken than anyone else living, so I was stunned (and alarmed) to find so much material I had never read. Here I should explain that Menken was a consummate performer who, like Madonna of the 1980s, made a career of shape-shifting. I expected to find web sites discussing Menken as African American, Jewish, and lesbian, but I did not expect to find so many or to see older rumors resurfacing electronically that had disappeared from publications seventy years ago. To give you an idea of the scope, Menken appeared in web sites focusing on the history of sports, magic, theater, Texas, nudity, horse riding, and feminism, among many others. I came across several ambitious conversation threads by playwrights and screenwriters discussing their various prospective projects on Menken. I found

notices for conference papers on Menken and prostitution, Menken and Twain, Menken and race, Menken and cross-dressing. I was truly appalled (if not surprised) to see how many web sites perpetuated a multitude of false "facts" about her. By virtue of a slick public medium each claim had a patina of plausibility despite the fact that most web sites had no footnotes, no bibliographies, no corroborating evidence of any kind. Yet no matter how well written or shallow and poorly supported they were, I immediately recognized that I must give them attention in her biography. History is always a relationship between the past and the present, and there was no denying that this explosion of information on Menken (about whom, I hasten to add, most people have never heard) was an expression of present-day understandings of the past.

In later investigations into Menken's presence on the Internet, I discovered another disquieting fact: these web sites were appearing and disappearing at an alarming rate. Five months after the first time I plugged in Menken's name, her name yielded close to 1,400 hits; the number had increased roughly four times in less than half a year. But one year later, only 962 sites answered the search. Perhaps it is this last scenario that I find most peculiar—the question that most makes me most hesitant about using the Internet as an archive: What happened to those more than four hundred web sites between 2002 and 2003? I cannot find them; it is as if they never existed, yet I documented them in an earlier essay. Given traditional reasons for why we note source material (the reader must always be able to go back and review the information source), was my previous Internet research valid? Could I use examples that no longer existed anywhere?

In this essay I pursue particular questions that have arisen in the process of writing a cultural biography of Menken: How does the World Wide Web as an archive of archives change the way we do research, conceive of research and artifacts, and pass that knowledge on to our students? Is it possible to "master" a topic in a world of overly abundant resources? How does immediate access to other scholars reshape our intellectual community? Our scholarship itself? The World Wide Web and its magnificent search engines are an incredible gift in many ways, but they cannot replace traditional archives, because both Internet and traditional archives come with their own limitations. As my research on Menken illustrates, the Internet is mercurial and ephemeral; however well it works, it is always *virtual*. Those of us in the business of research and teaching research are

constantly discovering both the limits and possibilities, struggling to see the puzzle whole when we still have only pieces. And I suppose this brings me to the biggest, if unanswerable question: If historical research profoundly changes, does that also signal changes in the historical discipline?

The Profession: Definitions and Resources

There is surprisingly little material written by historians on the subject of the Web as an archive. Ironically, the least helpful resource has been what this essay is about—the Internet. Even when limiting my search to scholarly web sites, I mostly find scholars discussing how to *use* the Web to do research, not how the Internet itself is changing the nature of research. Established historical journals, whether digitized or not, provide the most helpful secondary sources. Yet, with few exceptions, articles about the Internet are quickly outdated because they discuss web sites no longer in existence or speak of advances that now seem primitive.

Roy Rosenzweig is one of few scholars addressing how the expanded capabilities of the Web are changing our methods of historical research. Most recently, he focused on the paradoxical problem of having virtual access to a tremendous amount of material at the same time that digital mediums are constantly threatened with obsolescence. In so doing, he raised one of the main points of concern: "historians need to be thinking simultaneously about how to research, write and teach in a world of unheard of historical abundance and how to avoid a future of record scarcity."[1]

A discussion about the Internet acting as an archive or as a virtual map to a physical archive must begin with some agreement as to what historians do with these sources. History is a discipline tied to repositories. Archives are established and shaped by librarians, curators, financial backers, and current concerns of the society they serve. The histories written from these archives are also created not only by the individual historians and the cultural concerns of their times, but also by the institutions they serve (which give us, for example, hundreds of Civil War historians and extremely few examining American occupation of the Philippines). This does not mean that "writing history merely involves manipulating archives."[2] Archives yield the sources that are used as facts, but interpretation fuels the historical argument. Historians use facts to sup-

port their larger argument, and as Lorraine Daston so eloquently puts it, "evidence might be described as facts hammered into signposts, which point beyond themselves and their sheer, brute thingness to states of affairs to which we have no direct access."[3] Archival sources on their own are interesting and historical, but they do not speak.

The "facts" are fixed but the structure of history is fluid. Both professionals and amateurs write and publish history, but they tend to produce significantly different material. Professional historians—historians working in the academy or involved with various historical organizations—write history that contributes to a larger body of knowledge. Each article and monograph must clarify how it adds to the developing narrative patterns. By contrast, amateur historians write about isolated topics; they do not assume that others reading their work will know related texts, have seen a paper presented that challenges their thesis, or care how the biography of a robber baron, for example, elucidates changes in capitalism at the turn of the century. Amateur historians write because they believe the story they tell is inherently interesting, and that is enough. "Mastery" of secondary writing is not critical to amateur historians, but it is part of what defines professional history; every historical work coordinates with other historical work in some way.

Despite the impact of post-structural theory, the guiding force among professional historians remains objective truth.[4] However cynical the scholar, the goal is always to reveal truth, which historians do through their use of "facts," "evidence," and "mastery." Historians meet these criteria primarily through using textual sources, but the Internet has an impact on the way we view these texts by effecting their distribution, their abundance or scarcity, and the intellectual community making use of them.

Limits, Challenges, and Possibilities

Historians are generally more comfortable coping with a scarcity than an abundance of materials. Since the 1960s, the emergence of social history has led to generations of scholars writing history "from the bottom up," which has often meant finding creative ways to scrape that bottom for any smidgen of information. The need for innovative research methods can hardly be overstated when attempting to investigate the history of textually absent or silent groups, like Native American women, colonial-period slaves, or the itinerant poor of the Gilded Age. But now we are living in an age where information is being stored at a furious rate. The *New York Times* recently reported that that in 2002 people stored roughly five billion gigabytes worth of information "on paper, film, optical or magnetic media." That amount of information is double their estimates of information documented in 1999.[5] How can we hope to address or incorporate such a vast quantity of information with research methods created to address the opposite problem?

Abundance, then, causes conceptual problems because it reverses conventional wisdom of most historians and requires of them new skills and methodologies. An enormous amount of information causes a few interrelated conceptual difficulties: when surveying a massive amount of material, the historian must reduce its complexity. Does this compromise the supposed "objectivity" required? If reduction is impossible, then the historian must simply take a smaller slice of the material, rendering a highly specialized monograph that adds to the ongoing historical narrative, but is of little use to any but those writing in the same field. In either case, vast amounts of minutiae make historians more aware, if post-structuralism had not already given them a crisis of confidence, that what they are attempting to do is inherently limited. None of this is new, of course. Historians working in fields with an abundance of materials, such as the American Civil War or civil rights, have always had to make these choices. But the Internet greatly exacerbates the situation, bringing the dilemma to a much greater number of fields of study.

One of the requirements of writing serious history is to "master" all extent sources, primary and secondary. To be caught not knowing related texts is intellectually analogous to being caught with one's pants down. But for many scholars "mastery" may be impossible in the age of the Internet. Again, what is "new" about this situation is that it is effecting a far greater proportion of historians than before. From a practical standpoint, the vast quantity of information available "raises the demands on historians to read, analyze, and incorporate vast quantities of documents and information into short articles."[6] Rosenzweig suggests that simply "reading around" is inadequate in the age of abundant information and asserts that we may have to "learn to write complex searches and algorithms that would allow [historians] to sort through this overwhelming record."[7] But even if such methods would work for social and military historians, they would not address the needs of cultural, intellectual,

and political ones. My own experiences suggest the futility of trying to meet traditional requirements and keep a conscientious eye on the ever-changing web sites. Even as I was responding to my copy editor's suggestions for the book on Menken, my infrequent Internet searches were yielding new material. Did I need to incorporate information coming out until the galleys were produced? I did set a cut-off date out of practicality, but provocative material kept persuading me to push it back, until I finally received the galleys and addressing new research became prohibitively expensive. Because of the ease of "Googling" Menken, my research never actually reached a point of "rest," let alone completion.

Obviously then, the Internet challenges historians to reconsider the traditional ideal of "mastering" all major material on a subject. Is it necessary to "master" all secondary and primary material on a topic in order to address it? Again, this has never been a practical demand in some fields where there is an abundance of scholarship, but the enormous amount of information available via the Internet is revealing the problem more clearly by spreading it to a greater number of fields. The term "mastery" itself is a strange and problematic one, suggesting a conception of scholarly excellence that, at least on some level, impedes cooperative scholarship. It suggests that we must conquer the material, which makes me think of playing "king" of the hill when I was a child. It was clearly a gendered game that I, as a petite girl, was not expected to win, despite my personal expectation that I *must* win. Perhaps it would be more useful to require that historians simply do what we tell our students to do: to "engage" the work of other historians on the subject. "Engaging" material need not be comprehensive, like mastery, but it must be effective. Many historians already do this out of practicality; I am suggesting that professional historians as a whole change the traditional *concept* of what it means to be a specialist in favor of something more ongoing, interactive, and flexible in its fallibility.

Incorporating a vast, ever-changing array of materials presents yet another problem. We cannot ignore the practical implications of trying to "harness" greater amounts of information, no matter how wedded we are to intellectual goals: one only has so much time to devote to research and writing. Just because we are now using computers for writing and research does not mean we should become one of them. Yet that often becomes the message: now that it is possible to correct every mistake with a minimum of financial expense, scholars are expected to incorporate vast quantities of

material into publishable quality manuscripts in a bare minimum of time. But historical work takes time because it usually requires reflection. Using the Internet to follow up on developments on Menken, I often felt like I was in that famous skit from *I Love Lucy*: the one in the candy factory, when the chocolates keep coming faster, and Lucy and Ethel, unable to turn off the machine, cram candy into their mouths and down their bodices in an effort to cope with the overflow. Internet sources can be intellectually exciting, but the speed of materials is increasing and the professional requirements of production are increasing (both in terms of quality and breadth) to the point at which we are reduced to cramming them in without enough reflection.

But there is an odd professional paradox at the heart of all of this electronic archiving: despite worries of having too much material, historians are the ones *most* likely to want to digitize everything. Another rule of the profession is "save everything." One never knows when a piece of information has historic evidence. As much as historians might view the amount of material now available with a certain amount of trepidation, we also have emerged from a culture of scarcity that has preprogrammed us not to discard anything.

And work by other scholars is also increasing the flow of information. The Internet is profoundly changing our intellectual community. Many of the changes are positive and negative at once. A recounting of my experiences with the Menken project helps to illustrate my ambivalence about being part of the Internet community. I mostly consider the ease of communication a good thing, but the negatives are worth discussing because they signal what is lost in the process of all that is gained.

I worked on Menken in isolation until roughly 1998, when I first began to receive e-mails from people who saw my conference papers noted on Internet web sites and discovered my research focus. Our conversations were intellectually enriching and added to the project in the long run, but they also increased the time it took for me to create an overarching narrative able to sustain the increasing variables others added to the story. A rabbi in South Africa, for example, initiated an e-mail exchange that ended with her insisting that my research on Menken's Jewish identity went against her own; she wanted Menken to be Jewish, and demanded that I enlarge my definitions. I stuck with definitions of Jewish identity used in Menken's time, but our exchange did lead me to investigate twentieth-century reflections on Jewish identity and incorporate a more nuanced

discussion on the subject. A magician in Indianapolis electronically introduced me to a retired accountant in upstate New York who admitted, rather sheepishly, that he believed he might be Menken's descendent. I decided to include his story for a variety of reasons, but doing so required significant restructuring. I began to trade e-mails and attached writings with scholars all over the country—some working on Menken, but many others focusing on the other figures Menken knew or emulated (Mark Twain, Lord Byron, Algernon Charles Swinburne), and others who addressed related topics (photography, passing, sporting newspapers).

The Internet community also replaces the isolation traditionally tied to writing professional history, which makes the discipline far more friendly to many of us and perhaps less comfortable for many others. Back in 1989, I remember receiving an application to Tulane's graduate program that welcomed me and warned me: be prepared that graduate school will be a lonely experience; you will spend many years researching and writing alone. The idea horrified me. What was I thinking, going into a profession that required I give up human contact? Fortunately for me, the Internet evolved in time to render that prophesy obsolete. I do write in isolation, but once I put those documents away and click on Internet Explorer, I am back in a virtual conference that never ends. For me, this is a good thing. I am a social spirit; I understand my own thoughts better through expressing them; I need interaction to be productive. But this is the opposite of many others who need to be alone with their topic to formulate their own interpretation. It is true that they could choose to simply stay away, but what was once a way of life is now a choice that comes with major limitations.

Because of the Internet, I now know and can converse with all scholars known to be working on Menken. Again, this is both positive and negative; it creates a rich, creative intellectual community, but it can also make it difficult to separate oneself to craft one's own approach. In this milieu, we are no longer isolated scholars meeting up once a year at conferences; we are in constant conversation. At one point in time, I would have said that visibility via Internet gave me an advantage; now I would say that participating in the intellectual community electronically has become so common that those who do not are at a disadvantage. Many historians who, partly out of comfort, continue to use only traditional methods and ignore the electronic medium may find themselves out of touch with current scholarship. They become the wallflowers in a ballroom filled with

innovative dancers. Much of this breaks down along generational lines, however, causing a paradoxical problem: the ones least invested in the electronic community are often the ones with the most power in academic departments.

Nor can the virtual archive adequately replace the "real" archive in terms of sources, although it can greatly enhance our scholarship. My experiences researching Menken's early life as a celebrity in East Texas illustrate why we need to get our hands dirty. Knowing that Menken had first appeared in newspapers in Liberty and that her first known marriage certificate was signed in Livingston, I drove out to explore the findings of a few regional libraries. In the process of mucking around I not only discovered previously unrecorded evidence of Menken's activities in obscure sources, I also came to understand her ongoing relationship with this part of the country. Because of persistent (and false) stories of her girlhood in Nacogdoches, they still regard her as a treasured legendary figure. Driving through the lush but sparsely populated region, passing cinderblock strip malls now turned over for neighborhood bingo, and looking in vain for a healthy lunch, I realized that she was part of a glorious, mythological past. As a writer, visiting the region helped me both to picture her life there and to understand why legends of her Texas birth persisted despite all evidence. I later found several web sites discussing Menken as a daughter of Texas but, not surprisingly, they were singularly unhelpful. They, too, presented Menken as a legendary figure, but she was now cut free from the gritty, ragged aspects of the region. By virtue of the medium, she was as polished as a debutante from Dallas; the frontier conditions were erased in favor of simplistic frontier mythology. None of the material was new; it had come from hyperbolic texts written in the late nineteenth century. The poetry I had discovered in pages of crumbling newsprint went unmentioned; I would never have found it had I traveled to Texas only by computer.

Durba Ghosh's "National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation," in this collection, suggests a similar sense that the location and personnel of the archive may provide critical clues to the project. Ghosh writes, "what seemed like a great project in Britain was a terrible, even unspeakable one in India." It is easy to imagine the absurdity if she had tried to pursue her same methodology relying wholly on the Internet (in the unlikely scenario that both nations had the resources). I picture the British archives posting an exhibit on Colonial alliances between British men and

Indian women, while subject and key word searches on the Indian web sites respond repeatedly with "no such match"—suggesting that the historical subject is a reality in one nation and not another. By Internet alone, Ghosh would have missed the human dimension of the story that explained both the wealth and dearth of sources and the difficulty of finding out the truth of whether or not those relationships "were as carefree and consensual for the native women as for the men."

The experience I had in Texas was repeated over and over again, in California, Ohio, New York, Massachusetts, London, and Paris. The Internet sources corresponding with the places I had explored yielded much of what had appeared in major publications, but little new material. In terms of searching the life of a specific individual—even one with three hundred to fourteen hundred web sites mentioning her name—the Internet was far less helpful than visiting archives for a variety of reasons.

I did have some success when I used the Internet for materials originally produced for national consumption. I was fortunate that Menken was famous during the Civil War years, as there is a slew of web sites giving access to periodicals produced during the war. Through the rather extraordinary Making of America web site, a digital library maintained by the University of Michigan and financially supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, I was able to find several references to Menken and actually pull up the pages of the materials, visible in their original format. It was not the same as holding *Vanity Fair Magazine* in my hands and seeing where these stories fell within the scope of the magazine, but they were quickly available to me right at my desk, without having to apply for a grant or take a trip.

But had I only relied on digital archives, I would have missed nonverbal clues in my search. What surrounds the material found? How is it placed within the larger document? What does the cover of the item suggest about the target audience and how it was being packaged for sale? Does the quality of paper or print suggest something valuable about its production that changes the way we interpret the words on the page? For scholars of the history of the book and the many historians using material culture, digital reproductions are not adequate substitutions for artifacts.

Because of the nature of my project on Menken, using digital reproductions of most artifacts did not pose a problem for me. But they were not enough; they told tales I had already heard. I needed to see what had been overlooked by curators and archivists posting the materials; I needed to

see what had been deemed unimportant. The big difference between trawling the digital archives and visiting physical ones came in the wealth of seemingly useless manuscript material I found tucked in collections around the country. Just as Tony Ballantyne describes the "restless and seemingly ceaseless shuttling of paper" he found and followed in "Mr. Peal's Archive," I found wealth in the sheer volume of supposedly insignificant artifacts. Online catalogs rarely mentioned the details of their collections on Menken or one of her acquaintances, so I was often surprised to find letters, notes, photographs, playbills, and invitations that had managed to survive because some curator at one time made the decision to keep them, despite the fact that few if any had obvious merit. This allowed me to become familiar with Menken's handwriting, stationery, and phrasing at different points in her life—knowledge that became incredibly helpful in determining how to use various other materials. As I have indicated, Menken's bizarre history and circuitous route through popular culture has led to a number of false stories being written about her (which she completely encouraged, I should add). Even those publishing supposedly reliable biographies complete with footnotes have added to the layers of falsehood, for a variety of strange reasons.[8] The bits of flotsam I found collected on archival shores allowed me to make educated decisions about how to use particular material and made it clear where others had embroidered fiction over fact.

Access and Presence: Who's In and Who's Out

I have found the Internet most valuable in clarifying why Menken is compelling in the present day. History is about how the past is alive and active in the present, and never is that more clearly illustrated than on the Web. Because web sites are funded and maintained at a variety of levels by all sorts of entities—corporations, individuals, groups, organizations, enthusiasts working ad hoc—they are completely driven by present-day interests. Only a portion of historical writings on the Internet is "scholarly" in the way that professional historians define the term, that is, an argument written in conversation with previous work on the subject and fully supported by reproducible sources.

Because identity politics are extremely important at the moment to scholars and laypeople alike, Menken is rarely found on the Internet for

what she *did* during her lifetime, but rather for what she possibly *was*. Her antics add color and entertainment, so they appear in the articles, but they are not the central reason for featuring her on all of those web sites. What she "was" is further determined by whoever is hosting the web site. If the web site is funded by a Jewish organization, she is Jewish (usually without question). If the web site is one devoted to a conference on race in America, she may show up as African American, but if the conference is about transgender theory, she might appear as an example of nineteenth-century gender transgression. Feminist web sites present Menken as feminist, ignoring the many aspects of her self-performance that would jeopardize that image. Menken may have been all of these things, but each web site features its favored identity over the others.

The variety of Menken images is not unique to the Internet; magazines and books, after all, are also sponsored by organizations with some purpose behind them. A hundred years before the Internet truly blossomed, publications began focusing on Menken because of her identity and highlighting the events of her life that supported whatever claim was in question. What makes the web sites different from the publications on paper is that they disappear from public record when there is no longer interest in the subject on the part of the sponsor. They are thus more closely tied with present-day concerns than conventional publications, because the methods of placing them and then removing them are relatively quick, unmediated, and temporary. With the exception of a few major professionally funded sites, then, using web sites as source material is problematic for two reasons: many disappear without a trace and without warning, and few provide any means for checking their information.

At the same time, this ebb and flow of web sites also suggests the democratic nature of posting material on the Web. In the United States at least, it can be done cheaply and without revealing anything about the person posting the site. This can be a positive good in the case of marginalized historical subjects, such as the Queer Latino community discussed by Horacio N. Roque Ramírez. He rightly points out that "queer lives and queer desires" are not "the priority of mainstream historicizing and archiving practices." The Internet provides a tool for gathering intelligence on topics overlooked by academia and intellectual institutions. In this way, the Internet as archive may be said to go against what Craig Robertson concludes in his essay, "Mechanisms of Exclusion," because the process of placing a web site is not so much determined by power as it is a process of

archiving that creates power. As long as the researcher using the site is open to .com or .net information sources, as opposed to .edu, .org, or .gov, the information appears on a level playing field.

One of the central questions about the role the Internet plays in historical research must be one of access, which is directly related to questions of representation. Who does and who does not have access to materials available on the Internet? Certainly some parts of the world are more wired than others, and those are the places most shaping Internet resources. Within those regions, scholarly institutions and the institutions that fund them, such as the Mellon or MacArthur Foundations, are deciding what is of historical importance, and thus, who gets represented.

Internet web sites are publicly available to anyone with access to a computer and the means to get on the Web, and as most public libraries in the United States now have computer, Americans as a whole have access to a wide variety of sources. Databases are the exception. They work much like Internet digital archives, but their use is purchased, usually by an institution. Being a member of a wealthy university, such as Harvard or Princeton, can be a tremendous advantage, because they are able to afford subscriptions to an unbelievable number of databases. I discovered this when I visited the Schlesinger Library this past summer. The library itself has stellar collections and a wonderful staff, but I was equally awed by the number of databases that are accessible through the Harvard computer terminals. I was able to do years worth of research in one month by using keyword searches. For example, using Accessible Archives allowed me to search through fifty-five years of *Godey's Lady's Book* in a fraction of the time it would have taken me to read through all those magazines. Admittedly, key word searches are not exactly subtle; I am sure that I missed a lot of useful material along the way simply because I could not think of the correct terminology. Also, I had no idea how these stories fit into the larger magazine. Were they part of a special series? Were they surrounded with particular advertisements? But for anyone who has spent months searching through newspapers and periodicals the old-fashioned way, it is hard to see the ability to do a keyword search as anything but a godsend.

Perhaps the most obvious problem with electronic archives is that resource-rich cultures and institutions are dominating Internet use and thus determine what is present on the Web. Poorer nations are clearly underrepresented; one is hard pressed to find primary material digitally archived for many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America for exam-

ple. This situation exacerbates, and perhaps surpasses, the existing Western bias found in print culture.[9] The already problematic situation in Uzbekistan outlined by Jeff Sahadeo, for example, is compounded. The complicated history of documentation inside the nation is presented to the Internet world as simply silence. But we also see this happening within nations, as groups without consistent access to the technology are absent, even if they live in wealthy, Internet-oriented cultures, such as the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. British historian R. J. Morris suggests as much when he comments dryly that "it is easier to communicate with computer-using colleagues in California, Warsaw and Sydney, than in those in South London or the West of Scotland who are not (yet) 'on the network.'"[10] If the scholars of these regions are not using e-mail, then they are probably not yet funding digital archives either.

Established institutions are determining what gets archived. Do they leave out traditionally marginalized groups? Does the *way* the material is archived leave out particular groups? In terms of historical materials, African Americans and women, white and of color, are well represented in Internet archives because the medium emerged when scholarship in these fields was at its height. Indeed, African American men and women and white women are some of the best-documented groups on the Web by professionals and nonprofessional historical sites alike. For me as a professor, the many reproductions of runaway slave ads, for example, have added a great deal to my students' ability to work with primary materials on slavery. Likewise, many web sites devoted to civil rights are meticulous in scope and often include film footage. That said, there is next to nothing on other less popular but equally important topics such as African Americans and welfare, grassroots movements, or daily life between Reconstruction and the civil rights era. So, yes, African Americans have a presence, but that presence is fairly narrow in scope. Sites on women's history are more comprehensive, in many ways electronically paralleling the sophisticated development of the field. But they, too, are limited by their apparently implicit need to create a history that parallels traditional (read: white, male, middle-class, Protestant) history. Thus there are several truly amazing web sites on topics about women in public life: women in politics, medicine, abolitionism, or temperance. Web sites on more domestic subjects, such as women's dress or food preparation, tend to be posted by nonprofessional enthusiasts.

And, of course, any material on less studied or less well-documented

groups can be much more difficult to find. In my informal rambles through the Web, I have found that groups that are historically textually silent are the most poorly represented, because it takes innovative research methods to write their history. Native American groups, for example, are beginning to use the Web a great deal more, but, like African Americans, a lack of textual materials poses a problem. Individual Native American women who lived before the late twentieth century (with the major exceptions of Pocahontas and Sacagawea) are almost entirely absent. A huge number of immigrant groups of are also left out; if one were to try to track American immigrant history only by Internet, it would appear that most immigration began and ended in the decades around 1900. Poor white Americans outside of the South are also one of the least well-documented groups. Scholarly Latino web sites are beginning to emerge, but material on Latina women before the late twentieth century is still incredibly scarce. Not surprisingly, the same groups that receive little attention within institutions or require greater innovation in order to document their histories are receiving the least attention on the Net.

The irony here is that the Internet has the potential to provide unprecedented access to historical nontextual sources. We can already see some effort to make use of the Internet's ability to convey sound, images, and movement as well as text. There are a few historical archives beginning to address textually silent groups through oral history archives and song archives (where one can hear the person via Internet, as well as read the transcript), film archives, and sites showing material objects that may be viewed from different angles and distances. Most of these sites are rich in primary sources but weak in secondary ones. We need to see a better integration of the two.

Historical work on all groups would be served well by having easy access to digital collections of regional, municipal, and specialized newspapers. Right now the best solution to exhaustive travel is interlibrary loan, if the microfilm is available. Archiving such newspapers would probably best be handled at a state level: the Minnesota state archives, for example, would have a digital collection of all Minnesota newspapers. Doing so, however, would be complicated by the fact that many of Minnesota's historic newspapers cannot be found in Minnesota, but are part of collections in larger archives scattered about the country, such as The American Antiquarian Society or the Library of Congress. Such a site is sorely needed, however, and would go a long way towards providing

primary information on groups often left off the radar of national history. Right now the most comprehensive digitally archived newspaper is the *New York Times*.[11] But while it is true that the *New York Times* has been America's national newspaper for the past century, it was not the most influential paper during the nineteenth century and did not even exist in the eighteenth. Nor does a newspaper such as the *Times* begin to address such subjects as how Japanese fared in Seattle during World War II, or western coverage of the Plains Indian Wars, or the impact of Cambodian refugees on Florida race relations.

Passing the Torch: Teaching Students History in the Internet Age

Our final question must be how do we teach our students to use the Internet as a tool for historical research? Rosenzweig suggests that "future graduate programs will probably have to teach such social-scientific and quantitative methods as well as such other skills as 'digital archaeology' (the ability to 'read' arcane computer formats), 'digital diplomatics' (the modern version of the old science of authenticating documents), and data mining (the ability to find the historical needle in the digital hay)."[12] He is probably correct. But first I must learn these skills myself.

At the private Midwestern research university where I now teach, most of my students have grown up with computers. My experience suggests that while I can give my students guidance, they have far more to teach me about the Internet than I can ever hope to teach them. I believe that I must help them learn to distinguish a reputable source from a nonreliable one, to look for complexity where they find shallow simplicity, to see what is not there as well as what is readily apparent. In other words, I can teach them to use the Internet wisely by teaching them the same skills I taught before the Internet became a viable research tool. I have colleagues who believe this includes policing what students use, either by putting out lists of what web sites they are allowed to consult or by requiring students to electronically post the web sites they cite so that the professor can check them herself. But the time we have with students is limited and dear, and the energy and time we have for preparation is limited, no matter how dedicated we are to pedagogy. I do not see the value in sacrificing teaching valuable analytic skills in order to teach ones limited only to Internet

research. The answer clearly is to bring the two together: to teach students "to think," as they say, always keeping in mind that their lives, academic and otherwise, are increasingly mediated by technology.

The Internet as an archive poses specific problems for undergraduate teaching. Unfortunately, the many .com sites sometimes confuse my students. The plethora of legitimate material is rivaled by the slew of web sites consisting of little more than celebratory prose that gums up my students' papers and leads them away from thoughtful analysis. The simple solution is to tell them to use only web sites with .edu or .org in the address. Even so, because students are often writing papers alongside web sites they are checking, my colleagues and I have noticed increased problems with plagiarism. I am not talking about the students who willfully steal from other sources—that happened just as frequently before the Internet came into our lives. I am speaking of students who sloppily cut, paste, and paraphrase documents they dredge up while writing the paper. They sometimes reproduce the language and even the organization of other sources, without apparently realizing that simply footnoting the material does not render it legal. I would argue that the boundary between the paper they are writing and the paper they are citing is rendered conceptually thin by a medium that places the two documents side by side. Discussing the problem in my classes has gone a long way toward reducing it, suggesting that while in the process of writing many of the students become confused about divisions between their own paper and the web sites they cite. They know the difference between a published paper and their own; this is not a problem of understanding, but rather one of perception and remaining aware.

Truthfully, I fully believe that the best thing I can teach them about the Internet is that it is not the only or even the best tool for the job. The more the Internet comes into usage, the more I find I need to urge (and sometimes even coerce) them to use the library and archives, to contact reference librarians and consult bibliographic sources, to keep in mind census records and microfilmed city directories. Because Internet sites, no matter how well constructed, are not the same as working with tactile artifacts, deciphering handwritten records, or talking with a knowledgeable curator. Losing oneself in a pile of textbooks in the back of a library brings a measure of contemplation that easily surpasses impatiently surfing the Web. Waiting while the computer thinks simply is not the same as wading

through prose. My students are comfortable with the Internet; they need to be taught the virtues of the less entertaining but perhaps more useful physical repositories of information.

Raising the Bar

In my search for thoughts on the Internet and research, I found many comparing the emergence of the Internet to the advent of the printing press. Since we are clearly searching for similes to make the changes we face comprehensible, I offer up the car. Two decades ago in *More Work for Mother: Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, Ruth Schwartz Cowan demonstrated that the American response to new "labor saving" technology is to raise the bar, not give ourselves more time off but rather to expect more production.[13] The impact of the Internet follows that trend. Like the automobile, the Internet shrinks distance and changes the relationship of the traveler and destination. The invention of the automobile has changed our everyday lives in every way. It has led to many wonderful things, but it has also contributed to a more stressful life: commuting, excessive travel, complex extracurricular schedules, and the possibility of cramming in many small errands at the end of a long day. The Internet acts much like the car, in that the World Wide Web is a complex network of highways and the computer acts as our vehicle for speeding from point to point at the rate of whatever access we have purchased. Our standards have gone up; a meticulous gathering of material that was once the mark of a seasoned historian is now expected in graduate level papers. Theoretically, it is too easy to find the information to expect otherwise. But let us also be honest: the computer often does not live up to the ideal, and because we are creating expectations that leave no room for technological breakdown, this can cause real problems.

My own experience with Menken has led me to see the Internet as adding to my workload, not lessening it. I do not see this as necessarily a bad thing. In terms of scholarship, it has its benefits. Finding all of those web sites featuring Menken forced me to reevaluate my work within a present-day context. The presence of the Internet community means that I work with greater awareness of others. And as more digitized materials find their way into Internet web sites (as opposed to subscribed databases), I will come to rely more on my computer as a site of research.

But however bizarre and interesting the materials I have found through my computer, they never send me on flights of imagination like paging through original newspapers and getting the dust of two centuries under my nails. A picture of Menken on the Internet is impersonal and uninteresting in a way that can never be said about an original carte-de-visite in the palm of my hand—especially if I find a bend in the corner or words scrawled on the back. After a few weeks of reading through private letters, I came to know Menken in a personal way I did not even try to describe in the book. I could eventually tell with a glance whether the letter would be emotional, flirtatious, or prim, before I began to decipher the spidery script. And it was these ephemeral and, to me, fascinating details that fueled my interest and kept it burning through all the slow, painful, and numerous stages of writing, revising, cutting, and rewriting. And perhaps, however rational I have tried to keep my argument in this essay, it is that human response to tangible artifacts that I have seen time and again in my students as well as myself that convinces me that virtual archives will never serve as more than a place to begin and end the research journey; never as a place to dwell.

Notes

1 Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era," *American Historical Review* 108, 3 (June 2003): 738.

2 Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 25.

3 Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," in James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 243.

4 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

5 Verlyn Klinkenborg, "Information That Humans Create," *New York Times*, November 12, 2003; see *New York Times* online archives.

6 Rebecca Seamen, AHR electronic discussion, letter of September 6, 2003, posted at http: / / www.historycooperative.org / phorum.

7 Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance?" 758.

8 See Renée M. Sentilles, *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 268–80.

9 Roger A. Griffin, "Using the Internet as a Resource for Historical Research

and Writing," posted on the web site of Austin Community College's History Department, http: / / www.austincc.edu / history / research.html.

10 R. J. Morris, "Computers and the Subversion of British History," *Journal of British Studies* 34, 4: 511; posted on http: / / www.jostore.org.

11 See Proquest.com.

12 Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance?" 758.

13 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books: 1983).

PART II

States of the Art

"OFFICIAL" ARCHIVES AND COUNTER-HISTORIES