

# Trends in Deaccessioning and Reappraisal in Archives and Special Collections

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“underutilized as a collection management tool” (SAA, 2017).

## What are Deaccessioning and Reappraisal?

- Deaccession: n. “The process by which an archives, museum, or library permanently removes accessioned materials from its holdings” (“Deaccession”, n.d.-b).
- Reappraisal: n. “The process of identifying materials that no longer merit inclusion in an archives and that are candidates for deaccessioning” (“Reappraisal”, n.d.-a).

### Step 1 – Reappraisal, Step 2 – Deaccessioning

## Conflicting and Confusing Views:

- Weeding, Accession, Withdrawal, Retention – What are all these terms?
  - There is some disagreement about what deaccessioning and reappraisal entail, however SAA’s definitions classify them as two different processes, indicating reappraisal as a precursor to deaccessioning (Huggard, 2019).
  - Greene coins the term “distillation” as an intermediary between weeding and deaccessioning (Huggard, 2019).
- Are deaccessioning/reappraising good for our archives?
  - Not everyone agrees that these processes are healthy for an institution, however the SAA has determined that they *are* per their Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning and many agree, including Mark A. Greene (Greene, M.A., 2002).

“The archival literature does not conflate weeding with deaccessioning, and yet many in the profession appear to make this connection” (Huggard, 2019).

“With sound policies in place, and based on thoughtful and deliberate consideration, reappraisal, distillation, and deaccessioning are risks well worth taking” (Greene, M.A., 2002).

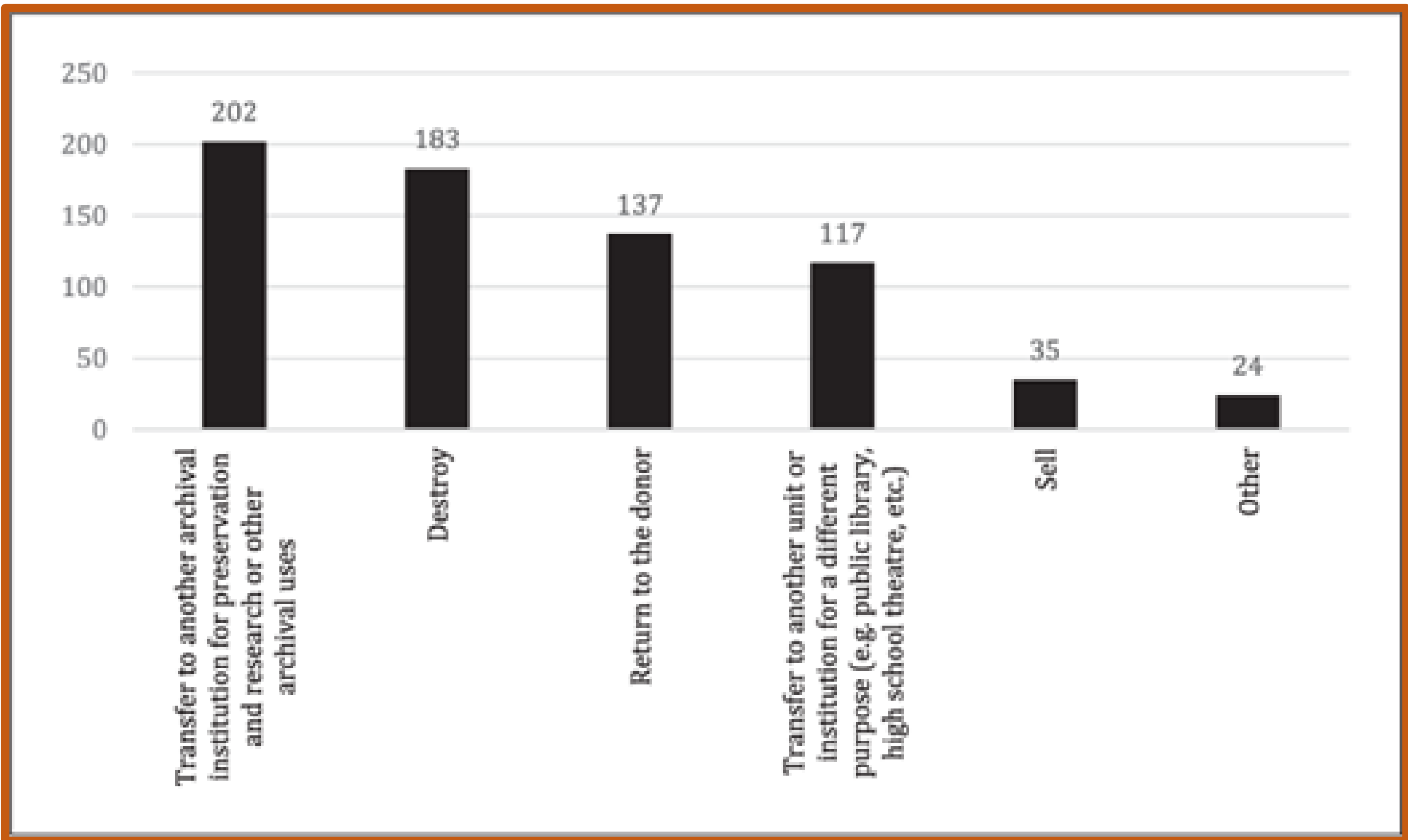
## Abstract:

As indicated by the Society of American Archivists’ 2017 revised Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning, deaccessioning and reappraisal are practices that are under-utilized in archival settings, though attention has been increasingly drawn to them within the past several decades. Beginning with Karen Benedict’s response to Leonard Rapport’s consideration of reappraisal and deaccessioning in 1984, these techniques as parts of collection management have been addressed from a variety of scholars and institutions, outlining differing concerns and considerations; however, despite the prevalence of discussion in collection management for libraries, there is still little discussion regarding its use in archives. Central issues focus on whether these practices can be considered good stewardship or a danger to an institution, as well as misunderstandings or attempts to differentiate them from other tasks including weeding.

## What Happens When We Deaccession?

- An institution may choose from several options. Among the more common methods are:
  - Transfer to another archival institution
  - Transfer to another institution for a different purpose (i.e., to public library, circulating stacks, community or high school theatre, etc.)
  - Sell
  - Return to the donor
  - Destroy

(Huggard & Jackson, 2019).



What does your institution do with deaccessioned material?  
(Reproduced from Huggard & Jackson, 2019)

## Where the Debate Began:

### It starts with a spark:

In 1981, Rapport publishes “No grandfather clause: Reappraising accessioned records”, sparking an internal discussion about whether deaccessioning and reappraisal are good stewardship practices. Benedict launches an argument against Rapport—1984.

### Rapport

- Too many evidential records
- Will these records ever be used?
- Were these records accessioned purposefully?
- What would we truly be losing if we deaccessioned a record?
- Resources are limited and we must be thoughtful about what we keep

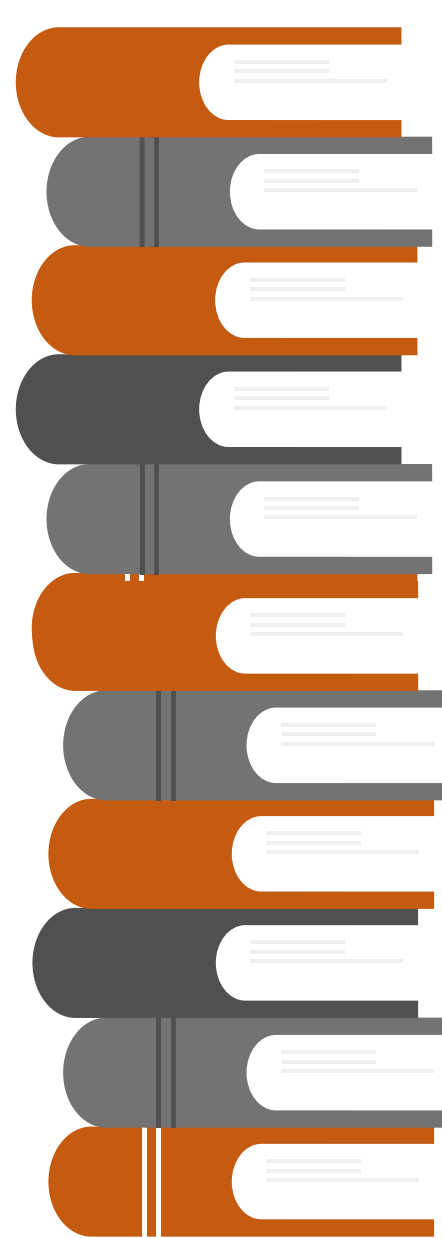
(Rapport, 1981).

### VS

### Benedict

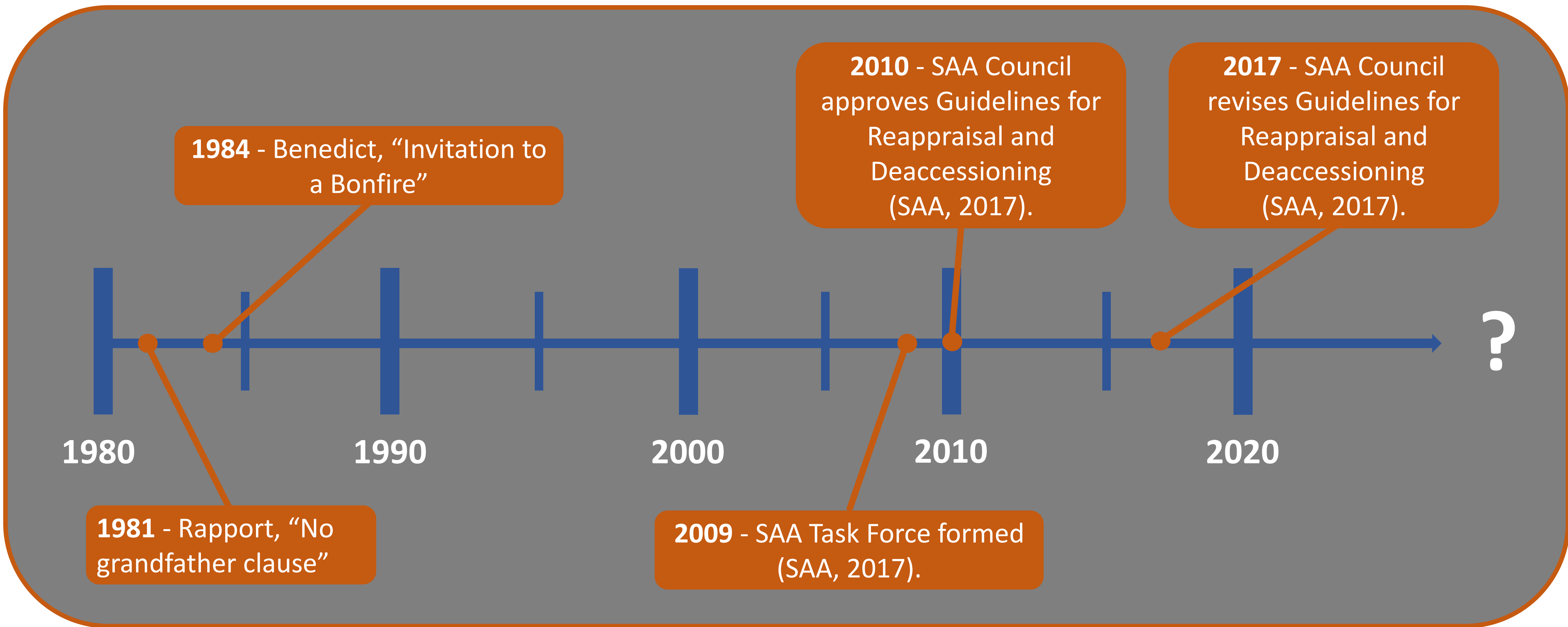
- Deaccessioning must be used with “extreme caution”
- Reappraisal is costly and time consuming
- We can’t be sure something has been mistakenly accessioned in the past
- Methods are only to be used in dire circumstances

(Benedict, 1984).



## Deaccessioning and Reappraisal In Practice:

- In a 2001 article, the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee’s Golda Meir Library experimental use of eBay as a selling platform proved successful. In just over six months, the library raised a total of \$2,300 in 101 sales (Doyle, 2001).
- Results published regarding the American Heritage Center in 2022 found that a massive reappraisal/deaccession undertaking (as well as a reinterpretation of their Collections Policy), decreased their overall backlog and improved accessibility (Jackson & Thompson, 2010).
- An initial attempt to assess collections at the New York City Municipal Archives was unsuccessful, but after reevaluating their reappraisal form, they were able to successfully dispose of over 1,000 boxes of materials and better prepare for future reappraisal/deaccession attempts (Gilbert, & Greer, 2019).



There is still much room for discussion regarding these practices, and while the topic has surged since the 1980’s there are still many aspects not yet touched upon.

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