

Getting Medieval on American History Research: A Method to Help Students Think Historically

Peter Burkholder

Fairleigh Dickinson University

PROBABLY ALL OF THE READERS of this journal would agree that getting students to “think historically” is a tremendously important, though frequently elusive goal.¹ The renowned history pedagogue Sam Wineburg even goes so far as to call historical thinking an “unnatural act” for students, who often learn history only as a dry sequence of names, places, and events that unfold from the pages of a seemingly omniscient textbook. Faced with a primary source, most students will scramble to identify “facts” that explicitly tie in with the course text while ignoring the rest of the document, and they will be hard-pressed to go beyond mere surface reading. At the other extreme, observes Wineburg, professional historians embrace the complexity and ambiguity of primary sources, and can interpret them with a fluency that escapes most of their students.²

In an attempt to increase college history majors’ ability to analyze primary sources, I set up a unique research project designed to tap into my students’ personal interests, and which would utilize a specific method requiring them to grapple with primary source materials in an unfamiliar, though hopefully more profitable fashion. The personal connection was accomplished by making my school’s buildings and grounds (an erstwhile Vanderbilt family estate), as well as their former occupants, the objects of inquiry. The novel approach consisted of applying a modified research technique called diplomatics (not to be confused with diplomacy or diplo-

matic history), a method typically employed by medievalists and archivists, to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century American source materials. The result was a project that challenged the students in an entirely new way, exposed some of their preconceptions about what constitutes a “typical” history paper, and got them thinking about primary sources on a deeper, more sophisticated level.

Course Context

This assignment, dubbed “The Mansion Project” in honor of the principal campus building the students examined, first took place in my historical methods course in 2006, and was repeated in 2008. This is a required class for history majors at Fairleigh Dickinson University, with most students taking it in their sophomore or junior year. There is no standard course curriculum among faculty for this offering, but generally speaking, the aims of historical methods are to expose students to various schools of thought, to have them delve into matters of historiography, to introduce them to specific methods of locating and procuring scholarly materials, and to perform some genuine research. (Many of these goals are touched on to an extent in lower-division classes, too. But historical methods represents an intensification of them all.) Finally, the class serves as preparation for a senior-level capstone seminar. Because about half of our history majors are pursuing careers in teaching at the K-12 level, my own version of historical methods also includes a unit devoted to pedagogy and inherent problems of history education.

Diplomatics: The Method Described

At the simplest level, diplomatics is a form of literary criticism, the origins of which, as an academic field, date back to the seventeenth century. Derived from techniques used to validate legal documents, diplomatics is a powerful method for determining not only the who, what, when, where, and why of sources, but also for systematically organizing their content, cross-referencing them with others, and placing them into context. Although traditionally thought applicable only to probative juridical documents, the scope of diplomatics can be broadened to include any written source, though it is certainly more useful for some types of sources than others. Defined by Arthur Marwick generically as “the science of the study of charters, decrees, etc., and of the style and language in which they are written,” it is a useful tool to medievalists, especially those who work with official ecclesiastical, governmental, or notarial records.³

The most tangible manifestation of diplomatics for the medievalist is

the catalog of acts. Each act consists of a breakdown of a given source into its constituent parts: an identification of the type of document (e.g., first-person charter, third-person notice, royal decree, bill of sale), where and when the actions described in it transpired, a description of the events recorded, a registry of who participated in and who witnessed the events, and a discussion of the document's context, relationship with other sources, and textual background. Oftentimes, there will be several distinct acts within a document. Some of these may be described explicitly, but others survive only as "fragments" (*fragmenta* in medieval parlance; incidental references to other acts for which a full document exists elsewhere) or as "lost acts" (*perdita*, references to acts for which no document survives, but which logically might have been created). The acts, along with their constituent sub-acts, are ultimately placed into a catalog, arranged chronologically by each act's latest possible date (the *terminus ad quem*).⁴ An example of how a medieval monastic cartulary entry is turned into a catalog entry is given in Appendix I.

Source Materials: The Twombly Archives

Fairleigh Dickinson University's Madison, New Jersey campus is located on what used to be the Florham estate ("Florham" is an amalgamation of Florence Vanderbilt and her husband, Hamilton Twombly). The main building on campus, called the Mansion, was the Twombly family living quarters when they sojourned away from the hubbub of their townhouse in Manhattan in the spring and fall. Built between 1893-1897 and surrounded by the exquisite landscaping of Frederick Lee Olmsted (of Central Park New York fame), the estate included the Mansion, a greenhouse for year-round fruits, a gymnasium and playhouse, a large stables/garage structure, and a full working dairy farm. The Mansion itself is a gigantic structure consisting of over 100 rooms and, as a residence, required a staff of 125. Like many dynasties of the Gilded Age, the family fortunes waned, and when Hamilton and Florence's daughter Ruth Twombly died in 1954, her sons had little choice but to auction off the family possessions and shutter the estate. Fairleigh Dickinson University purchased the property in 1957, and opened to students the following year. Classes now regularly meet in rooms that were once the bedrooms, offices, guest rooms, and servant quarters of the Twomblys.⁵ (See Figures 1 and 2)

I was fortunate to learn that a sizeable corpus of records from the Twombly days had survived and were maintained by a local volunteer group, the Friends of Florham, at the University library. These records were of various types—personal correspondence, household inventories, photographs and architectural plans, sales records, auction notices, newspaper coverage,



Figure 1: The Mansion as residence at Florham, main façade, when it served as one of the many homes of the Twombly-Vanderbilt family. Photo courtesy of the Florham Estate Photograph Collection, College at Florham Library Archives.

illegible dictation notes—but they had been meticulously organized by the Friends of Florham. Upon inspection, I determined that, with some imagination, many of them were amenable to treatment by the diplomatics method. Thus, here was a golden opportunity to get students into the archives and wrestle with unedited primary sources; to study a topic that was of immediate relevance to them; and to introduce them to an altogether different way of approaching source materials and the past.

Modifying and Applying the Method

So far, so good. In anticipation of the project, I had gone into the archives, edited a corpus of documents pertaining to the great pipe organ that once graced the Mansion, and compiled a full-blown catalog of acts, complete with indices of personal and place names. But as I have learned, even with the prototype, a template for the catalogs, and instructions on auto-numbering and cross-referencing features in Microsoft Word, teaching the method of diplomatics is challenging. No primer suitable to novices is available, and I quickly realized that a method which makes perfect sense



Figure 2: *The Mansion as university building, main façade. The building now serves as offices and classrooms on the Florham campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University. Photo courtesy of Dan Landau Photography*

to me (a method that had been honed over years of practice with a noted medievalist, and with the support of several other graduate students) is anything but natural to my students.⁶ In fact, even among medievalists, the method is not well known, so it came as little surprise to me when Americanists knew nothing about diplomatics. (Fellow historians trained in U.S. history have expressed interest in my prototype, though they initially admit to not fully understanding what I am doing.) Still, by first working through some medieval documents in class, and then applying the methods to selected sources from the Friends of Florham archive, students start to grasp not only how it all works, but why diplomatics is potentially such a helpful tool of organization and analysis. (An example of this process applied to a Twombly document is given in Appendix II.)

The class then visits the archives in the library. The experience is a bit of a shock to them, from the moment they are told to wash their hands and don white gloves before handling the documents. The idea that these records are one-of-a-kind, unavailable anywhere but right there (and not on the Internet!), is hammered home as they receive their assigned boxes of documents and wade into the past. Immediately, the students have to

make key decisions: Are their records amenable to the method? (Some clearly would be much more difficult than others.) Is there an obvious theme to all of the documents in a box? (Some appear to treat multiple, disjointed topics.) Can they even read the documents? (Some are in shorthand, others in a foreign language.) Students have the option of trading in their document collection for another, if they anticipate insurmountable problems. Significantly, even at this preliminary stage, we are far beyond the typical problems faced in the history classroom. If students' hands are literally clean, they are nonetheless dirtied by the messiness innate to archival work and research decision-making.

Because access to the archives is limited, students are instructed to bring digital cameras with them. After each settles on a source collection, they carefully photograph their entire document set, and then head off to begin the process of editing them.

Through the next couple of weeks, students perform the arduous work of applying the diplomatics method to their documents, which requires a level of examination of the sources that they have never faced. Identifying acts is usually straightforward in the context of personal correspondence or memos of record, but the matter can get tricky when dealing with inventories, brochures, receipts, or funeral notices (to name but a few). These cases require group discussion or even one-on-one assistance. Improvisation is often necessary, especially since, as I keep reminding the class, we are applying a highly technical method in a novel way. There is no clear roadmap for how to do much of this, so imagination, creativity, and problem-solving—skills that professional historians employ regularly, but which students are often terrified to apply for fear of a “wrong answer”—are essential.

Student Projects Described

Because the project's emphasis is squarely on the method, and because learning that method consumes a considerable amount of time and energy, students do not get the chance to work up their research into the more traditional sort of paper they might write for a history course. This is quite deliberate on my part. As Wineburg points out, getting students to concentrate on the *how* of history—the untidy “middle stage” that historians must contend with before the polished end product comes together—is inherently difficult to teach. Focusing squarely on that stage is thus consistent with my pedagogical goals, given the aims of a history methods course.⁷

Although not fully developed pieces of scholarship, the products of this assignment are truly fascinating, touching on subjects that would have been difficult, if not impossible to broach through more traditional historical approaches. Even at this intermediate stage of document editing

and catalog compilation, the papers shed new light on a place the students thought they already knew well, and open up a door to hitherto unknown people who had once strolled campus grounds.

One student's document set led her into the financial intricacies surrounding the death of Ruth Twombly while in Paris in 1954. Her fifteen documents consisted of letters, telegrams, bank notices, invoices, receipts, and lost telephone conversations. She was able to cross-reference a number of acts that arose out of them, and she identified seventeen individuals from across the United States and France who played a role in Mrs. Twombly's funeral arrangements. The student expressed frustration at one point over her putative inability to frame some of the documents within the context of diplomatics, but despite her protestations, she did an admirable job. Another student's project revolved around records concerning the actual funeral of Ruth Twombly. Showing keen insight, this student postulated that the assigned seating arrangement of the funeral attendees could be interpreted as a guide to social standing. (Coincidentally, medievalists often interpret charter witness lists in much the same way.) A third student grappled with a set of documents pertaining to a valuable Oriental rug at Florham, eventually sold in 1954 for \$3,000 as part of the dismantling of the Florham estate—and only after much back-and-forth on the part of buyers, sellers, and appraisers. The student's close reading and ability to peer behind the words on the pages of his sources are apparent, as he identified and catalogued as many fragments and lost acts as explicit ones.

The scale of students' final projects is noteworthy. I inform the class early on that this type of work creates bulk: the editing of the archival materials, the assembly of the catalogs, the creation of indices—the pages add up fast. Adding in their introduction, wherein students have to explain what exactly they did in the assignment, and the papers in spring semester 2008 averaged 4,706 words.⁸ This is not to suggest that paper length somehow equates with quality learning, but students did indicate that the assignment represented a quantum leap in workload. Despite their heft, these projects are not full-fledged history papers; rather, they are the raw materials, meticulously treated and carefully arranged, that could serve as the basis for the more traditional scholarship that students are accustomed to. The key point is that rigorous scholarship is not easy, and requires a considerable investment of time and effort just to reach the starting line of the writing process.

Student Learning Experiences Described

In my experience, applying the “medieval” approach of diplomatics to the archival documents of the Mansion Project is conducive to getting students

to think historically. In analyzing the sixteen projects that were completed in spring 2008, the following points become readily apparent.

First, students were clearly struck by the novelty of approaching history and analyzing primary sources in this manner. Eight of them (50%) made comments in their papers that using diplomatics was an altogether new experience. Wrote one student, "This project was probably the most unique assignment that I have had so far in any of my history classes." Phrases such as "completely new to me," "unlike anything I had done before," and "something that I have never been asked to do for a history class" permeated the papers.

Perhaps more tellingly, the project indicates that students have a firm preconception of what constitutes a standard history paper, and that archival research and diplomatics represents a radical departure from that standard. Thirteen of the students (81%) spontaneously declared that the Mansion Project differed markedly from the typical history assignment model. According to these students, the latter type of paper consists of writing in reaction to a question posed by the professor, wherein they utilize neatly edited and arranged sources whose credibility is taken for granted. But the source collection and methods of the Mansion Project called for something different. "Like most students, I am more familiar with the 'typical' type of research paper that involves reading a book, then writing a paper about it," said one student. A classmate echoed that sentiment, writing, "Usually for history projects or papers, research is required, but we never really had to analyze it the way we have for this assignment." A third remarked that "diplomatics differs from the traditional approach. In a traditional assignment, the information collected is thought to be valid and true," whereas the Mansion Project called the accuracy and reliability of source materials into question. Given that a primary goal of this project is to make students see history and the historical process from a different perspective, these reactions are significant.

Perhaps a reason for students' views on the Mansion Project as a different sort of assignment is that diplomatics necessarily imposes an organizational scheme that is foreign, yet ultimately productive. Nine of the sixteen students (56%) made remarks in their papers to this effect. Diplomatics "forced me to be very organized," wrote one student, indicating that it was "by far the most organized way I have ever conducted research." Getting control over a mass of disjointed documents was greatly facilitated: Said another student, "I had to go through twenty documents from several different people, and it would be difficult to remember the specifics of my research without the method." He continued in a confessional tone, "If anything, I learned how unorganized I was previously."

Little wonder, then, that students felt they would have been lost in trying

to analyze their documents, were it not for the specific method utilized for this assignment. Six students (38%) admitted that their prior training had not prepared them for such research. "I can't say I would know what to do with something like this, had I not been introduced to diplomatics. I would not even know where to begin," wrote one. "I would have no idea where to start," seconded a classmate, adding, "I would imagine myself trying to compile the information from all the documents in one long summary. This would not have worked nearly to the effect that cataloguing all the documents had." A third student, who at several points expressed that she did not especially enjoy the assignment, nonetheless readily appreciated the power of diplomatics:

When I thought about how else I may have approached these archival documents, I drew a blank. I honestly would have looked at the documents, found them interesting, and put them down. I probably would take notes on what I found, different dates, and people. I am not sure how I would have organized it though. Although I did not particularly enjoy the way we had to organize the information, I cannot think of a better way to do it.

Obviously, there are other, equally effective methods for tackling archival research like this: Americanists seem not to have suffered in their craft for lack of formal training in diplomatics. Yet, for these students, a method that emphasized set rules for how primary sources are to be analyzed, dissected, and arranged was critical to their ability to make sense of them. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that, according to the class, diplomatics is a difficult and time-intensive way of doing history. And if time-on-task is a crucial component to deeper learning, the fact that three-fourths of the class expressed how challenging the method was bodes well. "Diplomatics is really specific, and it takes a lot more work to develop than a typical writing assignment," said one, continuing, "It was a lot more work than I had anticipated." The demands clearly weighed on others as well, with words and phrases such as "tedious," "technically demanding," "difficult," and "time-consuming" punctuating their introductions. A classmate wrote, "It is a painstaking process to complete a project of this kind . . . I can honestly say, no project I have ever done has taken me this long." As a teacher, I have no problem with students being challenged or even a bit frustrated with such assignments. Quality history research is rarely easy.

So, diplomatics pushes students to higher levels of effort, and confronts them with a task that differs significantly from the "typical" history paper. But is the method, as applied here, conducive to deeper learning? Does it enhance the novice's ability to analyze primary sources on a more sophisticated level? For their part, the students resoundingly answered in the affirmative to both questions. Thirteen out of sixteen (81%) remarked that diplomatics forced them to view primary sources in a different way,

with many of them writing specifically that they had come to analyze their sources more deeply than they would have otherwise. Wrote one, “Before I learned this method, I certainly would have missed a lot of detail ... Diplomats forces the historian to acknowledge all of the fine details necessary to better recreate history.” Other students similarly stressed the method’s emphasis on depth and attention to detail; one summed it up this way:

[Something] that was different about using diplomats was the types of things I had to do with the documents. I had to analyze them in much greater detail than I had ever analyzed a document before. I had to look into the documents and find small details that could help shed light on people’s relationships and small, but important, occurrences. Diplomats cannot be used effectively without paying attention to detail, because the details [are] what help you shed light on a topic ... I learned a new appreciation for analyzing primary sources.

Attention to detail was not the only thing impressed upon them. Because of the requirement that they identify fragments and lost acts, students drew connections between the sources that otherwise would have eluded them, and found evidence for events that were not recorded explicitly. “After the first couple of documents,” described one, “you start being able to draw connections between them. Each document in some way makes reference to another.” A fellow student noted, “The documents [we were] given all have gaps ... There are things in the documents that are not exactly written, but are alluded to and need to be considered.”

Concluding Thoughts: Why the Method Works

If the method of diplomats succeeds in terms of getting students to treat primary sources more productively (and there seems to be ample evidence that it does), why is this the case? I suggest five principal reasons.

First, the method forces the student to analyze the entirety of a document. Wineburg points out that, when confronted with an unfamiliar text, students will often hunt for “facts” that correspond with a simplistic notion of “history,” usually as determined by a fact-centered textbook. In so doing, these students will read the source at only the most superficial level, likely missing key points and the even more important subtext of the document.⁹ That approach simply is not an option with diplomats, wherein students must identify and catalog each act in a document, no matter how seemingly trivial. As an added bonus, by methodically treating each source this way, order is imposed on a document set that otherwise might strike students as utterly chaotic upon first glance.

Second, diplomats encourages the student to see connections across their documents. Although the coherence of students’ document sets var-

ies, they are usually able to cross-reference their catalog of acts to some degree by identifying fragments or lost acts that tie the sources together. The requirement that students create indices of people and places (other types of indices can certainly be added) helps build up a historical database of key players and locales that might otherwise go unappreciated. The user-friendly auto-numbering and cross-referencing features of Microsoft Word—features that none of the students had ever used before—go a long way towards highlighting these connections.

Third, diplomatics reinforces the notion that surviving records constitute only the surface of history. This lesson is especially driven home by the requirement that students identify and, wherever possible, cross-reference fragments and lost acts as discussed above. In doing so, diplomatics considerably “thickens” the documentary base by calling attention to implicit evidence—the hidden text that students often have a very difficult time identifying.

Fourth, diplomatics exposes students to how difficult, tedious, and time-consuming actual archival research really is. Professional historians know all too well that research is an inexact science. It is an iterative process involving false starts, occasional frustration, and a tremendous investment of time and energy. Yet, students often meet historical writing only in its final and polished form. This is particularly unfortunate since, as Thomas Kuhn has remarked, “in history, more than any other discipline I know, the finished product of research disguises the nature of the work that produced it.”¹⁰ By emphasizing the method of diplomatics as a building block to historical inquiry, students experience first-hand this essential “middle stage” through which any worthwhile history writing must pass.

Finally, learning is affective in this assignment. The source materials pertain to the students’ own campus, refer to places and names that ring familiar, and provide a glimpse into a way of life that once flourished where the students now live. I could have used a collection of translated medieval documents to teach diplomatics, but I doubt the class would have been as invested in the project. Moreover, the latter approach would not have gotten the students working with original, unedited archival materials.

To sum up, the method of diplomatics as applied to the Mansion Project pushes the students out of their comfort zones, reveals details and significance that would otherwise be overlooked in the source materials, and demands creativity and problem-solving skills. In other words, it probably brings students closer to thinking historically than anything else they have done up to that point. As one student put it: “In my opinion this assignment has more to do with history than any other assignment ever asked of me, because it put me in a position of dealing with what real historians do.”

Notes

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1. See for example Patrick Rael, "What Happened and Why? Helping Students Read and Write Like Historians," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 1 (November 2005), <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/39.1/rael.html>>; Todd Estes, "Constructing the Syllabus: Devising a Framework for Helping Students Learn to Think Like Historians," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (February 2007): 183-201.

2. Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), esp. chs. 1-3. See also Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, who find that purely fact-based history, as opposed to analysis and interpretation, is the mainstay of most history classrooms, at least at the K-12 level; *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 1.

3. Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, third ed. (London, U.K.: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989), 396. A much more in-depth introduction is Leonard Boyle, "Diplomatics," in *Medieval Studies: An Introduction*, ed. James Powell, second ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 82-113. Archivists utilize diplomatics as well. See Heather MacNeil, *Trusting Records: Legal, Historical and Diplomatic Perspectives* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 20-24, 86-112.

4. Some catalogs of acts are in the following works on medieval Anjou: Louis Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XI^e siècle* (Paris, France: Picard, 1906; reprinted, Geneva, Switzerland: Slatkine-Megariotis Reprints, 1974), 237-342; Olivier Guillot, *Le comte d'Anjou et son entourage au XI^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, France: A. & J. Picard, 1972), esp. vol. 2; Steven Fanning, *A Bishop and His World before the Gregorian Reform: Hubert of Angers, 1006-1047* (Philadelphia, PA: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1988), 93-177. However, the contents of these catalogs have been truncated. Full catalog of acts entries, as well as explanations for their construction, are found in a number of history Ph.D. dissertations from the University of Minnesota; see for example W. S. Jessee, "Robert the Burgundian, An Eleventh-Century Angevin Noble," 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1989), esp. vol. 2; and Peter Burkholder, "The Birth and Growth of An Angevin Castellany: Durtal in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2000), esp. vol. 2.

5. No official history of the Twombly estate's transition from private residence to Fairleigh Dickinson University exists. See, however, Rebecca Maxon, "College at Florham Turns 50," *FDU Magazine* 16, no. 2 (2009), 21-24; available online at <<http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/09ws/florham1.html>>. Background on the Vanderbilt family is in Arthur T. Vanderbilt II, *Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt* (New York: Morrow, 1989).

6. Students read the chapter on diplomatics by Boyle (see note 3 above), but it was far too technical to be of much use.

7. As an analogue, see the innovative case of Prof. Charlie Cannon's architecture students at the Rhode Island School of Design. For their studio course, these students "do not meet many of the traditional standards of a design studio," focusing instead on the

complex process of architectural projects. Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 63-67 (quote at 66).

8. Some very short papers from students who did not follow directions helped skew that figure lower. Six out of sixteen students (38%) produced projects of over 5,000 words, and four out of sixteen (25%) went well over 6,000.

9. See Wineburg, *Historical Thinking*, 76-79.

10. As quoted in Constantine Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 39.

Appendix I: Turning a Medieval Document into a Catalog of Acts Entry

The appendices provide a glimpse of the method used for this project. In practice, it is necessary to walk students through this process very slowly, and to use multiple examples.

Immediately below is my translation from the Latin of an entry in the cartulary of the monastery of Saint-Aubin in Angers, France. Medieval monasteries routinely recorded their donations or sales in the form of first-person charters, which were then often condensed into third-person notices such as this.

Document of the concession of Hugh, *nepos* of Beringerius Pancevallus, concerning those things that he had given to us along with his son, done before everyone in the court (*curia*) of Durtal. A certain land that Beringerius Pancevallus had given to us along with his son and two *solidi* in annual due (*census*) were falsely claimed by Hugh, his *nepos*. But one day, Abbot Girard made a trip to Durtal in order to settle certain affairs. And when he heard the false claim of the young man, not wishing to have anyone with a calumnia, he asked that Hubert, lord of the above-said castle (*castellum*), order Hugh to come [to court]. Having presently been summoned, [Hugh] soon arrived, [and] Beringerius Pancevallus, who had quitted to us the aforesaid things, was present. And when [Hugh] saw [Beringerius], he did not want to entangle himself in a lawsuit (*placitum*), but dismissed the above-said false claim. These are the witnesses to this affair: Hubert himself; Radulf of *Roca*; Hubert, son of Frotmund; Tegrin; Haimeric of *Corrum*; Tetbald of *Troeia*; Isembard of *Troeia*; Almannus the vicar; Arnulf of Gouis.

We note that the main act concerns Hugh's claim to land that was previously given to the monastery of Saint-Aubin by Beringerius Pancevallus, and the settlement of the dispute thereof. The prior act of Beringerius's donation is a *perditum* (if no record of that transaction survives), or a *fragmentum* (if such a document survives). As it turns out, a document recording Beringerius's earlier gift does indeed exist as a separate document in another part of the cartulary. Thus, the first sub-act for this catalog entry is a *fragmentum*, followed by an entry for the main act, all of

which constitute entry number **26** in this particular catalog. Note that a listing of the participants in and witnesses to each act is given, as well as an explanation for the dating of each entry and a manuscript tradition.

26.

A. *Fragmentum*, October 1080 at the earliest, but before [B]; at the chapter of Saint-Aubin, Angers

Beringerius gives a land [at le Puy] to the monastery of Saint-Aubin in order that his son be accepted as a monk.

Participants: Beringerius Pancevallus; Hubert IV, lord of Durtal (*in absentia*); Rainald of Marigné; Isembard of *Troea*; Tegrin; Arnulf of Gouis.

Witnesses: None given.

The document describing this act is *Cart. de Saint-Aubin*, no. 294 (catalog entry **25[E]**), from which we learn the specific land donated, as well as a full listing of participants. This act occurred after Hubert IV became lord of Durtal, which could have happened in October 1080 at the earliest; see *ibid.*, no. 288 (catalog entry **14[C]**).

B. Notice, 8 May 1082-30 March 1096; at the court (*curia*) of Durtal

Hugh, *nepos* (nephew or grandson) of Beringerius Pancevallus, falsely claims the land [at le Puy] that Beringerius had given to Saint-Aubin along with his son. Abbot Girard hears of the claim and asks Hubert IV, lord of the castle (*castellum*) of Durtal, to summon Hugh to court at Durtal. Upon a meeting between Hugh, Beringerius, and Hubert IV, Hugh dismisses the claim.

Participants: Hugh, *nepos* of Beringerius Pancevallus; Beringerius Pancevallus; Hubert IV; Abbot Girard of Saint-Aubin.

Witnesses: Hubert IV; Radulf of *Roca*; Hubert, son of Frotmund; Tegrin; Haimeric of *Corrum*; Tetbald of *Troeia*; Isembard of *Troeia*; Almannus, vicar; Arnulf of Gouis.

Girard was abbot of Saint-Aubin from 8 May 1082 to 9 January 1106, which provides us with our *terminus ab quo*. There was a Haimeric of *Curron* who left for the Holy Land with Hugh, lord of Chaumont, on 30 March 1096 at the latest (see Olivier Guillot, *Le comte d'Anjou*, vol. 2, C 393, p. 243); he died at Nicaea (*Gesta Ambazensium dominorum*, in *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou*, Louis Halphen and René Poupardin, eds., p. 101). Thus, our *terminus ad quem* is 30 March 1096.

Manuscripts:

A. Original, lost.

B. Copy of the 12th-century, cartulary of Saint-Aubin, Bibliothèque Municipale d'Angers (France), MS 829, folio 25.

Edition:

a. *Cartulaire de Saint-Aubin d'Angers*, le Comte Bertrand de Broussillon, ed., 3 vols. (Paris, France: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1903), no. 300, vol. 1, 342-343.

This is a fairly simple, straightforward document, as these things go. Still, the diplomatics method systematically extracts the contents of the source, arranges it uniformly, cross-references it with other relevant documents, dates the events, and provides full manuscript and edition information. Especially when dealing with dozens (or even hundreds) of such records, this method has clear strengths.

Appendix II: Turning a Document from the Twombly Estate Archives into a Catalog of Acts Entry

Below is my edition of a letter from the Twombly estate records. It is the first in an exchange of letters wherein the rector of Grace Church solicits the donation of the Mansion's pipe organ and other properties from the heirs to the Florham estate, following the death of Ruth Twombly in 1954. Full manuscript information is given in the catalog of acts entry that follows it.

[Begin letterhead]

Grace Church
Episcopal
Madison Avenue at Kings Road
Madison, New Jersey

The Rev. William L. Nieman, Rector Church Office Phone—Madison 6-0106

[End letterhead]

January 18, 1955

Dear Mr. Burden:

In talking to Mrs. Paul Moore on Sunday, she suggested that you would not mind if I wrote to you to ask about the pipe organ which, I understand, was in Mrs. Twombly's home in Florham Park. About a year ago our Church had an organ man who told me that it was once a very wonderful organ and he wondered what had become of it. I write to you about this, since the present organ at Grace Church

is very old and it will be necessary for us to replace it soon. I am wondering if you would let me know if there is now a pipe organ in the Florham Park house and if I could talk to you about it.

With the death of Miss Twombly, it is quite natural that a number of people in the Diocese have been wondering about the disposition of the estate. You may be interested to know that the Diocese of Newark has had in mind, for several years, the securing of a piece of property and, if possible, a suitable building, for a Diocesan Conference Center. This year the Diocese will embark upon raising a large sum of money for the building of more Churches and also for the purpose of securing a Diocesan Conference Center. I do not know what your plans are for the disposal of the mansion. Perhaps this building would not be at all suitable for a Diocesan Center, and perhaps you would not be interested in discussing such a purpose anyway. However, it may be that some of the buildings could be used for such a purpose, including the building that houses the tennis courts and the swimming pool. If you are interested in discussing this last matter at any length, I am sure that Bishop Washburn or Bishop Stark would be most interested in talking it over with you.

I do know that the Church was very close to Miss Twombly's heart, and it would seem fitting that some of the land and perhaps some of the buildings be used for Church purposes as a memorial to the Twombly family. They were for many years members of this Parish.

Faithfully yours,

William L. Nieman [original signature]

William L Nieman
Rector

WLN/rw

[Handwritten in ink:]

c: Mott
Lyons
Briggie
S.C.B.

Applying the method of diplomatics, this edition translates to entry **1** in a catalog pertaining to the pipe organ at Florham, as appears below. Because the "witness" category does not apply here as it did to our medieval example, people involved in the sub-acts are identified as participants (those who played an active role) and references (those who did not).

1.

A. Probably a series of lost acts, members of the Diocese of Newark, several years prior to [D]

Unnamed members of the Diocese of Newark discuss plans to secure property and funding for a new Diocesan Conference Center, as well as funds to build new churches.

Participants: Unknown.

References: None.

Rev. William Nieman indicates these plans have been in the works “for several years,” relative to his letter described in [D]. No documents pertaining to the diocese’s expansion are included in the Twombly/Burden papers, so they are listed here as lost acts. We might assume, however, a paper trail to exist in the diocesan archives.

B. Lost act, conversation between “an organ man” and Rev. William Nieman, early 1954

An unnamed “organ man” informs Nieman that the organ at Florham Park “was once a very wonderful organ,” though he does not know whatever happened to it.

Participants: Rev. William Nieman, Grace Church; an unnamed “organ man.”

References: None.

This was clearly a conversation. Nieman indicates that it occurred “about a year ago,” relative to [D], placing it sometime in early 1954.

C. Lost act, conversation between Mrs. Paul Moore and Rev. William Nieman, 16 January 1955

Mrs. Paul Moore suggests to Nieman that he ask William A. M. Burden about the pipe organ at Florham Park.

Participants: Mrs. Paul Moore; Rev. William Nieman, Grace Church.

Reference: William A. M. Burden.

Context indicates this was a casual conversation, so it is assumed no document of it was ever created. This act took place “on Sunday,” likely the Sunday immediately preceding [D], dated to 18 January, which was a Tuesday in 1955, calculated using <http://www.timeanddate.com/>. Therefore, [C] occurred on 16 January 1955.

D. Letter, William Nieman to William A. M. Burden, 18 January 1955

Rev. Nieman writes Burden to “ask about the pipe organ,” expressing that the present organ in Grace Church (Madison, NJ) is “very old” and will soon need replacement. He further indicates that Miss [Ruth] Twombly was “very close” to Grace Church, and that the organ, as well as endowments of buildings and land, could serve as a memorial to her. Nieman also expresses that the Diocese of Newark is seeking a conference center, and suggests that buildings and/or land at the estate of Florham might be suitable for these purposes. (He makes specific reference to the tennis court and swimming pool buildings as suitable; note that these structures are no longer extant.) He finally invites Burden to talk with Bishops Washburn or Stark about these matters further.

Participants: Rev. William Nieman, Rector, Grace Church; William A. M. Burden.

References: Bishop Washburn; Bishop Stark; Ruth Twombly; CARBON COPIES TO: Seward Mott, Marvin Lyons, William Briggie, Shirley Burden.

This is a very diplomatic letter seeking a sizeable donation, and it plays heavily on Ruth Twombly’s former association with Grace Church. The document was typed by “rw.” Bishop Washburn = Benjamin Martin Washburn (served 1935-1958); Bishop Stark = Leland Stark (served 1958-1963; note that he spent five years prior to his episcopacy as Coadjutor); see <<http://bishopsearch.dioceseof-newark.org/profile/htm/04history.htm>> (viewed 18 April 2006). William A. M. Burden and Shirley Burden were brothers who inherited the estate of Florham; see catalog entry 2[A].

Manuscript:

A. Original, typed letter on 8 ½ x 11 cotton bond paper, with Nieman’s signature, The Friends of Florham Archive, Twombly/Burden Papers, Box 1, Series 1/4; FDU Library at Florham.

Edition:

a. See above.

Like the case of the medieval document in Appendix I, we see here the rigor and systematic approach required of diplomatics. Instead of scanning Nieman’s letter for ostensibly “historical” or “important” information and extracting bits and pieces in a haphazard manner, diplomatics identifies one main act (Nieman’s solicitation in [D]), as well as at least three distinct lost acts prior to [D]. As such, the method both thickens the documentary record, and necessarily considers the entirety of the source.