

REPORT ON THE SURVEY OF MEMORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES IN LUCAS DO RIO VERDE

Bertram Lyons

Introduction

In 1999 a survey was taken of Brazilian archives and libraries.⁴ It was a success, but very little information was gathered to document the nature of such institutions in developing areas of Brazil such as the state of Mato Grosso. In her introduction to “Building Preservation Knowledge in Brazil,” which discusses the extent and findings of the project, Ingrid Beck notes, “it has been said that Brazil is a country without a memory, firmly rooted in the present and with its eyes on the future.”⁵ Of course, that is what the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) project was out to disprove. And, of course, it succeeded in its goals. Brazil has a memory. The people of Brazil have a memory. The network to document and preserve this memory is strong and growing.

That being said there are places in Brazil that did not appear in the survey. These places are not homogenous; there are many different reasons why they did not participate in or appear in the survey. Take for instance a town, a young town, in Mato Grosso called Lucas do Rio Verde, a town of less than thirty years, a town with nearly 40,000 inhabitants, a town built on demand, a town based in industrial agriculture. A town, the history of which, tells fascinating stories of pioneers, government mandates, national expansion, land grabbing, big business, frontier development, migration, labor issues, environmental policy, international agricultural exchange in the twenty-first century, culture clash, class structures, among many others.

Are places such as this devoid of history, devoid of support for the preservation of historical documentation? Does the Brazilian government support such development? Do private interests bolster preservation and documentation efforts? What is being done to build or to document local histories and who is carrying out such work?

As an archivist from the United States, this is not likely a set of questions I should be addressing. This is not my country, my culture, or my business. However, here I am, after living for nine months in Lucas do Rio Verde, asking these very questions and finding that, as always in life, the answers are complex and the details fascinating.

I entered the world of cultural heritage because I am interested in the documentation of society and culture for the sake of those who will come after us. I studied museology and history at the University of Kansas in the United States. I studied archival science and theory independently and at the University of Kansas. I am a certified archivist through the Academy of Certified Archivists. I have worked in museums, archives, and libraries for more than 10 years. I understand the distinct realms of each discipline, but I am interested more in the network of documentation that spans the boundaries and borders of these realms. I am interested in the realm of historical and social documentation in general.

Currently, I am employed as an archivist at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. I was on leave with my wife in Brazil for nine months as she pursued research for her doctorate in Geography. While in Lucas, I explored questions about the nature of documentation, about how young towns develop cultural heritage infrastructure, and about what the answers to such questions contribute to assumptions about historical documentation and to the larger international discourse on preservation and access to records of the past.

4 Beck, Ingrid. *Building Preservation Knowledge in Brazil*. Council on Library and Information Resources, November, 1999. Accessed here, 2011/03/27: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub86/pub86.pdf>.

5 Ibid., 1.

I asked and am asking these questions because I do not believe that archives, museums, and libraries are a given. Because I believe that people look to existing models, but people also improvise. Because I believe that people value their histories, people tell stories about their histories, and these stories matter.

When I learned that I would be living in Lucas for nine months, I decided it would be a great opportunity—a rare opportunity—to pursue a research project on a topic of interest to me. Therefore, I designed a project to conduct a survey of the cultural heritage and historical documentation landscape in Lucas. The Association for Cultural Equity⁶ and the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives⁷ funded this work.

Project Description

We come to know the history of a place and its people from access to records and other artifacts that are left behind from the activities of everyday life. Similarly, information about the past is passed from person to person through memory and oral transmission. Oral histories, publications, government records, personal records, diaries, manuscripts, stories, photographs, sound and video recordings – these are some of the vehicles whereby information about the past is kept and retold. In contemporary western societies, a plethora of memory institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and cultural centers manage, in concert with social networks, the maintenance and dissemination of information about the past. Of course, these memory institutions are social constructs. The networks one social group constructs for memory preservation may differ entirely from the next. There is no perfect composition or alignment of such networks. They are ever-shifting and ever-changing. For this project, therefore, I proposed a survey of one nascent network of memory institutions with the intention of revealing new insights into the development of memory institutions in developing communities in an increasingly digital era.

Lucas do Rio Verde in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso has a complex history. It is physically located in the heart of Brazil, and it is in a place that is and has been at the heart of national and international importance: pre-MST (Landless Movement) land conflicts, industrial agriculture, environmental conservation, economic development, frontier expansion, to name a few. As a settlement project of the federal government of Brazil, the area began being settled in the 1970s and early 1980s. Farmers from Parana squatted on the land beginning in 1976 when federal highway BR-163 was just being cut through the Cerrado. Four years later in 1981, INCRA (National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) opened a federal land settlement program in what would become known as Lucas, bringing up landless settlers (203 families) from Rio Grande do Sul who had become involved in land disputes. Eighty families from Sao Paulo state were also brought. In 1985, Lucas became a district of the town of Diamantino and began a three-year fight to be emancipated into an independent municipality, which it achieved formally in 1988, a little more than 23 years ago.⁸ Since then industrial agriculture happened and now the area is part of Brazil's most productive soybean producing region. Lucas is also now home to South America's largest meat processing plant, built recently by Sadia. Lucas has grown quickly and with the boom of industrial agriculture, a soon-to-come railway linking the area to sea ports for export, and growing international and national investment in the area, it looks likely that the area will continue its speedy development. It already has a population of over 40,000 citizens, more than 10 schools, a professional futbol team, at least more than 40 churches, and boasts large cultural communities from southern, northeastern, and central Brazil.

My project looks at Lucas and asks, what institutions are responsible for documenting and preserving the activities – political, cultural, social, economic, industrial, educational – of the people

6 Official website: <http://www.culturalequity.org>.

7 Official website: <http://www.iasa-web.org/>.

8 Castro, Sueli Pereira, Joao Carlos Barrozo, Marinete Covezzi, and Oreste Preti. *A Colonizacao Oficial Em Mato Grosso: 'a nata e a bora da sociedade'*. EdUFMT: Cuiaba, MT, 1994, pp 95-100.

who live and interact there? What networks have been established to capture and disseminate the preserved information? For this project, I conducted a survey of memory institutions in Lucas do Rio Verde to develop baseline data on the types and extent of memory resources that exist in the town. The survey captures information about the history and ongoing management of each institution, including collecting practices, audience, mission, and long-term planning. It also documents the nature of the institutions' holdings and the ways in which these holdings are used and accessed by local and external communities.

Project Methodology

During the initial phase of the project in Lucas, I identified possible repositories, including the public library, the municipal archive, several private cultural heritage centers (Centro de Tradições Gauchas, Flôr do Cerrado, and Associação Cultural Gruner Wald), the local higher education university (Faculdade La Salle), and the municipal office of the Secretary of Education and Culture. These preliminary contact points helped me understand the mainstream cultural heritage climate in Lucas. Primarily, during this time, Professor José Dario Munhak, head of the municipal archive and history museum, sat with me and helped me to understand the history of Lucas and the history of the city's archival documentation as held by the city government. In these first months, I took time to learn Portuguese, I searched for other possible repositories in the area, and I began designing the survey that is the foundation of this project.

The eleven survey questions themselves are simple, but the survey was designed to minimize stress on the behalf of the repositories. The lower Amazon region in which Lucas is located is sensitive to foreign researchers because of years of NGO activity in the area's environmental issues. Also, as an outsider with minimal language skills, I wanted to be clear that I was trying to learn, not to prescribe. I wanted to be very clear to survey participants that I was not intending to critique the practices or opinions of the people in the area and that I was focused primarily on understanding such practices and opinions. To establish a baseline for data collection, I developed a questionnaire template that contains questions aimed at organizational/institutional repositories and personal/private collections.⁹ This questionnaire was delivered to each repository who participated in this survey in order to insure consistent capture of quantitative data and to align all qualitative data gathered during the survey.

I intended to record interviews with central individuals from each institution about issues including funding sources, management structures, community outreach strategies and initiatives, operational procedures and practices, digital resources and capacities, facilities, collections development, access to and use of collections, audience and mission, as well as future plans and priorities. However, the survey questionnaire covers these issues, and my Portuguese language skills were not strong enough to maintain in-depth conversations. Therefore, I did not carry out recorded interviews. I did develop relationships with each participant, and if it is warranted in the future, I could request and complete recorded interviews. The survey includes a summary of the contents of each repository, including plans for access, management, and long-term preservation. The results of these questionnaires and my participant observation constitute the bulk of the project and the final report.¹⁰

Survey Findings

I identified and surveyed eight institutions in Lucas that are currently housing or creating caches of historical documentation. Three are government institutions, three are communication services, one is a private education institution, and another is a not-for-profit cultural

9 Survey questionnaire is accessible at the following URL (as of 2012/04/01): https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pP_qIphlx-YjctcRvVWsur2B2rBuV8DdoLCltTeo1Btg/edit

10 Survey data (translated from the original Portuguese to English) is accessible at the following URL (as of 2012/04/01): <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/cc?key=0Ai3bVvof9sl1ddGtKtMVpEN293MVjxeVd3WHFoUkppaFE>

heritage organization. Following are the types of collected materials identified as collection materials by respondents: newspapers, books, photographs, videos, news reports, advertisements, magazines, documents, reports, theses, interviews, and objects of material culture. All of the respondents held items in quantities of a thousand or more; three held objects in quantities of tens of thousands. Half of the respondents stated that they intended to save and preserve their collections for as long as possible; the other half stated that they would maintain their collections as long as it was of use to the business of the institution. All reported similar storage methods based on the nature of the collected material. Physical objects for the most part are stored in cabinets and on shelves, usually in folders. Digital items are stored on CDs, DVDs, external hard drives, internal hard drives, and, in one instance, networked servers. Regarding digital items, two participants reported having no digital content, one reported having all digital content, the remaining respondents reported the percentage of digital material to be somewhere between 15 and 80 percent.

Two of the three communication organizations reported that it is important to save historical documentation because it is a business incentive for the organization. The other reported that it is important to document the history of the city and the region. The remaining five respondents reported that it is essential to preserve their collections for documentation of the history of the city and the region. In all cases, the head of the institution has sole responsibility for deciding what will be kept and preserved. Regarding access to the collections, only one participant reported their collection to be off limits to the public. One institution charges a fee for use of its collections, and one institution requires a screening of the purpose of research before access is allowed. No respondents reported an active outreach program for informing the community about the collections. However, all participants stated that their future goals are to preserve their collections for either public or private use.

Discussion

I began this research by getting to know the town of Lucas and understanding its landscape and the work environment. I spent time with the employees of the office of the Secretary of Education and Culture, which led me to the public library, and then to the museum and archives (both of which currently reside in the space of the public library). The director of the museum introduced me to the library at Faculdade La Salle (the local university). I visited local schools to meet the teachers and understand what resources the schools have and use for research. I also attended cultural events at local traditional culture centers, including the CTG (the Center for Gaucho Traditions) and the Flôr do Cerrado (the center for Matogrossense culture and art).

Due to the lack of online resources to conduct this survey (most of these organizations lack any online presence short of news articles and press releases), the majority of my work in Lucas was face-to-face. I will note that the municipal government of Lucas posts legislation and notices online for public access.¹¹ They offer over two thousand public documents in PDF form for download or online viewing. Two of the TV stations, TV Rio Verde and TV Conquista, host websites that offer multi-media streaming of current news reports. One weekly print newspaper, *Jornal O Luverdense*, offers page-by-page online access to their most current editions. Other than that, there is very little online access to cultural and historical documents in Lucas. Except, and I think it is important to note, Lucas, for its size, has a strong online presence in terms of social media and external coverage. For instance (as of 2012-04-01):

Google: "Lucas do Rio Verde" 1,860,000 results

Google Images: "Lucas do Rio Verde" 148,000 results

Google Videos: "Lucas do Rio Verde" 71,000 results

YouTube: "Lucas do Rio Verde" 3,320 results

From april 10 2006 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYVJsmtOBCL>) to today (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpQybNshSJl>)

¹¹ Lucas do Rio Verde city government website: <http://www.lucasdoriorverde.mt.gov.br> (accessed 2012-04-01).

Flickr: “Lucas do Rio Verde” 502 results

From July 8 2004 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/metalog/301063437/>) to March 22, 2012 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jaimemartins/6871448540/>)

At the heart of citywide, active historical documentation are the municipally mandated museum and archive, neither of which have actual facilities. Activities and collections of both are located within the public library. The Secretary of Education and Culture oversees all three of these agencies, but all three have separate histories of development.

Lucas’ Museu Histórico do Município is mandated by law¹² to house the local history museum and the municipal archive, but it has not yet been actualized into a physical structure: “Art. 4º - O MUSEU HISTÓRICO – Museu da cidade de Lucas do Rio Verde, órgão subordinado à Secretaria de Educação e Cultura, tem por finalidade recolher, abrigar, preservar e mostrar peças e documentos que testemunhem a história, a arte e da cultura dessa cidade. Ao mesmo tempo procura pesquisar e divulgar a cultura mato-grossense e outras advindas da formação desse povo nas suas diferentes abrangências, bem como promover o intercâmbio cultural e artístico com outras entidades congêneres do estado, do país e do exterior.”¹³

Local historian and professor at Faculdade La Salle, José Dario Munhak has been working on research and development for the Museu Histórico since April 2010. Although the institution is slated to become a history museum, Munhak has focused extensively (and solely) on the acquisition of documentary materials, including photographs, legal documents, and research texts, both physical and digital in nature. Because there is no physical space to house collections of the Museu Histórico, Munhak borrows space from the municipal library, which is housed by the Secretary of Education and Culture, to organize and to store this growing archive. Currently the collections span approximately 12 linear feet, and are composed predominately of photographs (some original, others copies or prints). Munhak is developing an organizational schema for the collection, along with minimal indices of the archive’s holdings. The library has little climate control and few resources to acquire archival storage materials. Currently, access to the collections is only available through contact with Munhak. He would like to continue growing the archival collections—Munhak requests donations from municipal residents—but he is reluctant to go too far until a secure building is built or designated to house the collections.

I worked closely with Munhak and his assistant, Fatima Terezinho Longo, to get a sense of the collection and the goals. Since there is no physical home for the museum, they are focusing on building the archival collection, which currently consists of photographs (probably around 1000), documents, newspapers, and magazines. Munhak also has created a small digital collection of images (mostly digital photographs of the entire backlog of the local newspaper, *Folha Verde* – since the newspaper itself will not release any of its archives to the public, Munhak found back editions in the library at Unilasalle and photographed them page by page in order to add them to the public archive). The archive has limited supplies and little contact with archival colleagues in Brazil. At this point they are working to establish an organizational ontology in order to begin to create catalogs and finding aids for their collections. The materials are not available to the public without close assistance by Munhak and Longo (because they are neither cataloged nor processed).

12 Originally the law provided for an Arquivo Historico Municipal Rio Verde, 2002/10/31 (<http://www.lucasdoriorio-verde.mt.gov.br/sisPref/legislacoes/arquivos/968/legislacao.pdf>), but in 2005 this was subsumed into the Museu Historico, 2005/11/22: <http://www.lucasdoriorioverde.mt.gov.br/sisPref/legislacoes/arquivos/648/legislacao.pdf>; accessed 2011/03/27. According to municipal organizational charts, the Library (DBIBLIO) and the Museums/Archives (DMA) are two separate divisions under the Coordinator of Libraries and Museums (CBM) in the Secretariat of Education and Culture (SMEC): <http://www.lucasdoriorioverde.mt.gov.br/sisPref/legislacoes/arquivos/662/legislacao.pdf>, accessed 2011/03/27.

13 Text provided to author by José Dario Munhak via email correspondence, 2011/3/31.

The library, Biblioteca Publica Municipal “Monteiro Lobato”, was first mandated through public law in 1989. I have neither found nor heard evidence of the existence of such a library until 2002 when a new public law created the library as it is today, giving it its current name and providing funding for the construction of a physical space. It contains approximately 10,000 holdings, 4 computers with Internet connections, a full-time librarian—Laice Correa Godinho Ribeiro—, and space for researchers.



In the back of the library is the current municipal archive (although I make a strong reminder here that the municipal government has ample facilities and technology for records management – which it handles within each secretariat). What you see here is the archive of history and culture, and its funding is minimal. The idea for a municipal archive of history is first seen in public law in 2002. It doesn't show up in any budget until 2005, at which point it combined with the newly created history museum.



Faculdade La Salle (Unilasalle), a local university since 2008, is host to its own library.¹⁴ With a larger collection than the municipal library, and with more hospitable facilities, this library is open to students and employees of Unilasalle, with only limited access for the general public. This library is mostly composed of published resources and online database subscriptions, but it does have a small collection of local newspapers, magazines, and student papers, including master's theses. None of these unpublished materials are cataloged or available online, but they are of great value to the documentation of local history in Lucas. The facilities are quite modern and these unpublished resources are kept in an air-conditioned room.



The Association for Preservation of Matogrossense Culture (also known as Flôr do Cerrado¹⁵) is a not-for-profit cultural organization. It offers dance and music lessons for all ages, a community library specializing in local and regional history, festivals and events, and community support for low-income families. Aside from a unique collection of books about Mato Grosso, the Flôr do Cerrado collects photographs, newspapers, and news reports that document its efforts in the community.



14 For more information about Faculdade La Salle, visit their website: <http://www.unilasalle.edu.br/lucas/> (accessed on 2012-04-02).

15 For more information about Flôr do Cerrado, visit their website: <http://flordocerradomt.blogspot.com/> (accessed on 2012-04-02).

Two additional cultural organizations exist in Lucas: Centro de Tradições Gaucha and Associação Cultural Gruner Wald. Aside from public events that display cultural traditions, I am uncertain whether these organizations maintain physical or digital collections.

Many of the historical documents that exist in Lucas are still in the hands of private individuals and private businesses. The local newspaper, *Jornal Folha Verde*, maintains its own archive of the newspapers it has printed since its inception, which predates the proper city of Lucas by two years. In all estimations, this is the largest and most thorough collection of documentation about the city of Lucas and its inhabitants. The owners of *Folha Verde* do not offer public access to this material; instead, it is used only as a revenue generating resource for their publications. Another private business, *Karis Comunicação*, owner of *TV Conquista* and *Jornal O Luverdense*, operates in the same fashion, valuing its archives for its business needs, but not making the archives publicly available, except the most recent newscasts and newspaper editions.¹⁶ Similarly, *TV Rio Verde* maintains a small archive of its news programs, but unlike the other large communications businesses, the owner of *TV Rio Verde* wants this material to be publicly available.¹⁷ Because Lucas has a complex history of development, some documentary materials are in the hands of Brazilian Military, while others are with large landowners and farmers. Still other materials are held by the families and individuals who settled Lucas, working under the blazing Mato-Grosso sun to build farms, roads, utilities, and homes. The saying, “Knowledge is Power,” holds true in Lucas, where historians and cultural proponents struggle against businesses to secure historical documentary resources.

Political factors influence the development of historical documentary repositories in Lucas. Because the town is new, because there were struggles during the creation of the town—between 1st wave and 2nd wave settlers—, because most of these people still live in the area, and because many of the 2nd wave settlers are in powerful positions in the municipality, the concept of history is contested and the question over which version should become the official version is a sensitive subject.

Environmental factors also affect the establishment of long-term collection repositories in Lucas, which is in the transition zone between Amazon and Cerrado ecosystems. There are two seasons: wet and dry. Both are hot and the wet season maintains a condition of high relative humidity for over five months. These factors, along with the lack of funding for environmentally controlled facilities—many of the buildings are made of concrete or patchwork wood, with no air conditioning and open windows—, and the inescapable presence of insects, lizards, and other pests, limit the capacity for long-term preservation of any documentary materials in Lucas.

In light of the above obstacles, there is a growing desire on behalf of the population of Lucas to document its past and its present. As I was leaving Lucas to return home, José Dario Munhak made a point to inform me that “the people [of Lucas] are willing to preserve local history; in the places I visit, the people always welcome me and ask to assist in the historical research.”¹⁸

References

Beck, Ingrid. *Building Preservation Knowledge in Brazil*. Council on Library and Information Resources, November, 1999. Accessed here, 2011/03/27: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub86/pub86.pdf>.

Castro, Sueli Pereira, Joao Carlos Barrozo, Marinete Covezzi, and Oreste Preti. *A Colonizacao Oficial Em Mato Grosso: ‘a nata e a bora da sociedade’*. EdUFMT: Cuiaba, MT, 1994, pp 95-100.

16 For more information about *Karis Comunicação*, visit their website: <http://www.tvconquista.com.br/> (accessed 2012-04-02).

17 For more information about *TV Rio Verde*, visit their website: <http://www.tvrioverde.com.br/> (accessed 2012-04-02).

18 Email correspondence between the author and José Dario Munhak, 2011/3/31.

Resources

Survey questionnaire is accessible at the following URL (as of 2012/04/01): https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pP_qJPhlx-YjctcRvWsur2B2rBuV8DdoLCItTeo1Btg/edit

Survey data (translated from the original Portuguese to English) is accessible at the following URL (as of 2012/04/01): <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/cc?key=0Ai3bWoF9sl1ddGtKMVpEN293MVjxeVd3WHFoUkppaFE>

Lucas do Rio Verde city government website: <http://www.lucasdorioverde.mt.gov.br> (accessed 2012-04-01).