THE VALUE OF BRAILLE IN ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS
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ABSTRACT
Braille is uniquely capable of documenting the lives of those who use it, but is often misunderstood by both the archival profession and the public. Many collections remain hidden because archives staff does not read Braille. Misconceptions about creation, utilization, and long-term value must be overcome to ensure unique content is not overlooked or discarded.

BRALLE MYTHS VS. BRAILLE FACTS

- Only converted print publications for education or leisure
- Paper-based system made obsolete by audio recordings and screen reading technology
- Unchanging standard, whose materials are rare but not unique
- Content is only useful to blind people
- Written system fully equal to print, used for everything from reading Harry Potter, to writing a shopping list, to documenting personal research.
- Translation programs, refreshable Braille displays, and new file formats mean that Braille can be produced and experienced electronically.
- Adaptable to any purpose and can be used to document any topic, which means that sometimes the information it contains can only be found in Braille.

BRALLE COLLECTIONS AT THE TENBROEK LIBRARY

JACOBUS TENBROEK COLLECTION
BIO: NFB founder, professor, & constitutional scholar
BRAILLE: Loose Braille documents with no indication where documents begin or end, most written in specialized version of contracted Braille personalized by creator
VALUE: Includes creator’s own notes on research and development of writings show thought process and the formation of opinions still used by legal scholars today.

ABRAHAM NEMETH COLLECTION
BIO: Mathematician, inventor of Nemeth Braille Code for Mathematics and Scientific Notation, 1952
BRAILLE: Electronic Braille files (.bfr) on 3 ½” floppy disks, bound Braille working drafts and reference materials
VALUE TO THE COLLECTION: Documents his development of and continuing work on a specialized system of Braille that has changed over time, but is still in use.

ROBERT JAQUISS COLLECTION
BIO: Blind child in the 1950s who went through public school, rather than school for the blind
BRAILLE: Handmade print/Braille storybooks, maps with tactile features and Braille labels, school assignments/artwork with tactile features.
VALUE: Example of parents’ creative efforts to provide an equal education to their son before school districts required by law to do so.

RESOURCES
Braille adds value to collections by supplying information about the creator, the challenges they faced, and the successes they achieved which may otherwise be lost. Outreach to the blind community can help bring hidden collections to light, diversify the historical record, and empower a population often excluded from the reading room.

CONCLUSION

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