

ARCHIVAL

OUTLOOK

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Read all about it! After World War II, a group of Jewish children in a displaced persons camp in Kaserne, Germany, read a newspaper as they await the train. These camps were run by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, a predecessor of the UN). Turn to page 6 to read more about the UN's partnership with the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research to plan an exhibit on the experiences of Jewish displaced persons in Europe. Photo courtesy of the United Nations Archives.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Rachel Vagts
president@archivists.org

The Search for SAA's Next Executive Director Begins

It's with bittersweetness that I share that our long-serving executive director, Nancy Beaumont, will step down from her position once a successor has joined the association. During her eighteen-year tenure, Nancy has guided us through periods of both growth and challenge. She will be greatly missed, as she has become a friend to so many of us during her tenure.

We're fortunate that Nancy is leaving us in a strong position to recruit a successor. The task won't be easy, but we have a compelling and important story to tell as we seek candidates to fill the role.

The SAA Council has formed a search committee to oversee the process of selecting a new executive director and we have retained an executive search firm, Vetted Solutions, to coordinate the search.

The search committee comprises the following members:

- **Courtney Chartier** (SAA vice president/president-elect and head of Research Services, Emory University)
- **Eric Chin** (SAA Council member and senior archivist, NBCUniversal)
- **Stephen Curley** (SAA Council member and digital archivist, National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition)
- **Derek Mosley** (SAA Council member and archivist/division manager, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library)
- **Christopher Prom** (associate dean and associate university librarian for Digital Strategies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
- **Rachel Vagts** (Chair, SAA president and manager of Special Collections and Digital Archives, Denver Public Library)
- **JoyEllen Williams** (SAA Foundation Board member and special collections curator, Kennesaw State University)

The SAA Council recognizes the critical importance of this position to the long-term health of the organization, and we are well prepared for this transition.

importance of this position to the long-term health of the organization, and we are well prepared for this transition.

Transparency is important to the Council and to the Search Committee—we will keep you updated on the progress of the search through announcements on the SAA website (archivists.org), *In the Loop* e-newsletter (archivists.org/intheloop), *Off the Record* blog (offtherecord.archivists.org), and other online communications channels.

We hope to introduce members to the new executive director at SAA's Annual Meeting in August! ■

This is an incredible group of dedicated and passionate members who are committed to ensuring a thorough search process that will result in an experienced next executive director for SAA. The SAA Council recognizes the critical

ARCHIVAL OUTLOOK



The Society of American Archivists serves the education and information needs of its members and provides leadership to help ensure the identification, preservation, and use of the nation's historical record.

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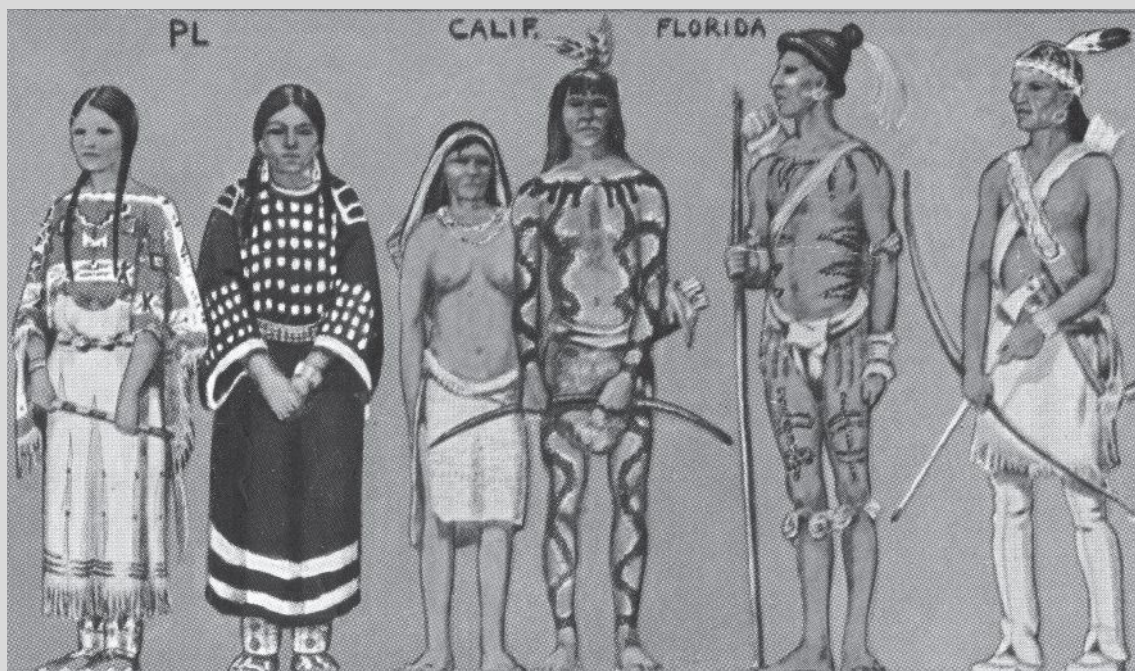
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Reparative AND Inclusive Metadata

UTA LIBRARIES
REEVALUATES
ITS PRACTICES



Stephanie Luke and Kathryn Slover, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries

Inclusive metadata is important for honoring the communities it describes as well as for historical accuracy. At University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) Libraries, we are making an active effort to implement reparative revisions in our metadata practices. In July 2020, UTA Libraries created a Library Plan of Action for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. This plan identified action items for the UTA community, UTA Libraries staff, and for libraries and archives collectively and resulted in several committees that specifically focused on the revision of our metadata practices. As such, UTA Libraries and Special Collections staff have been creating more inclusive metadata. This can be seen in the specific example of Jo Mora's "Indians of North America" poster (detail above).

Paying Attention to Biases

Jo Mora (Joseph Jacinto Mora), born in Uruguay in 1876, was an American artist who worked in a number of mediums as an illustrator, painter, sculptor, muralist, photographer, and cartoonist. He is best known for his pieces that showcase the culture of the American West, particularly in California and Arizona. One of the most interesting aspects of Mora's life is his time spent with the Hopi and Navajo tribes in Arizona. Much of his work takes inspiration from his experiences there. Mora's poster "Indians of North America"

was printed in 1936. The work is largely a graphic representation of a number of Native American tribes. It features many elements of tribal culture, including traditional dress and residences, material artifacts like beadwork and weaving, and scenes of dancing and hunting.

When archivists and librarians handle materials like this poster, they must be cognizant of not only the ways in which the item may be historically problematic, but also how library classification and archival description might reinforce biases if they are not examined. One of the steps that UTA Libraries is taking to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment is assessing the ways in which the Libraries' metadata may hold unconscious biases. Although metadata can be a great tool, historically the archivists and librarians who create metadata have not held the perspectives of the people they described.

One example of this is the description of Indigenous people and cultures in Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). LCSH is widely accepted as a controlled vocabulary for description of archival and special collections materials. As early as

the 1960s, library and information science professionals began to raise concerns about the implicit and explicit bias in subject headings.¹ These subject terms were created by archival and library professionals and not necessarily by the people who are described. Describing materials this way often negatively impacts marginalized communities because the terminology can stereotype or misrepresent entire groups of people.

Detail of Jo Mora's "Indians of North America" poster, 1936. Courtesy of University of Texas at Arlington, Special Collections.

Although metadata can be a great tool, historically those who create metadata have not held the perspectives of the people they described.

For example, the Library of Congress still uses outdated terms like "American Indians" or "Indians of North America" to describe all Indigenous people. These terms are not inclusive to all Native peoples and tribes and are sometimes even assigned incorrectly. Throughout the years, members of marginalized communities have brought attention to many of these problematic subject headings and have suggested terms that are more accurately representative.

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How an **ARCHIVES BLITZ** Can Benefit Your Institution

Lilly Carrel, The Menil Collection, and
Theresa Mayfield, Moore Memorial Public Library

Gain valuable professional experience, make friends, and cross an archival project off your to-do list—is there a more rewarding assignment? That's the basis of an *archives blitz*, a community processing event that brings together archivists and students to assist local organizations with archival projects.

Derived from the activities of the SAA student chapter at the University of Michigan School of Information, an archives blitz provides hands-on archival experience and skill sharing in addition to a collaborative environment to foster and build relationships. Typically an in-person, half- or full-day event, an archives blitz can address any aspect of the archival enterprise, and it's particularly well suited for projects such as team processing of small to medium collections, inventorying large audiovisual collections, or rehousing physical material. A successful blitz has meaningful, tangible outcomes for both the host institution and volunteers.

The Archivists of the Houston Area (AHA!) and Moore Memorial Public Library (MMPL) partnered to host Houston's first archives blitz in October 2020, with a goal to enhance descriptions for eleven oral history interviews.

Supporting Small Archives

Since 1998, AHA! has served to increase contact and communication between archivists and people working with records, to provide opportunities for professional development, and to promote archival repositories and activities in the greater area of Houston, Texas. As the fourth largest city in the United States, Houston's archival landscape is as diverse and multifaceted as the city itself. From prominent universities to local community archives, institutions vary in size, collection scope, and user base. (Learn more about Houston-area archives at <https://houstonarchivists.org/about/area-archives>.) After a second, successful biennial Houston Archives Bazaar in 2019, AHA! began exploring more ways to engage with the local archives community.

The Moore Memorial Public Library, established in 1928 and located in Texas City (about 40 miles southeast of Houston), is the sole public library in its area, with a service population of 56,000 people. MMPL houses an archives that collects and preserves materials related to the rich history of Texas City. The archives is staffed by a single local history librarian charged with formalizing an archival program, in addition to contributing to routine public library activities. A partnership between AHA! and MMPL to host an archives blitz was an ideal opportunity to provide meaningful collaboration with and support of a small public library.

Defining a Focus

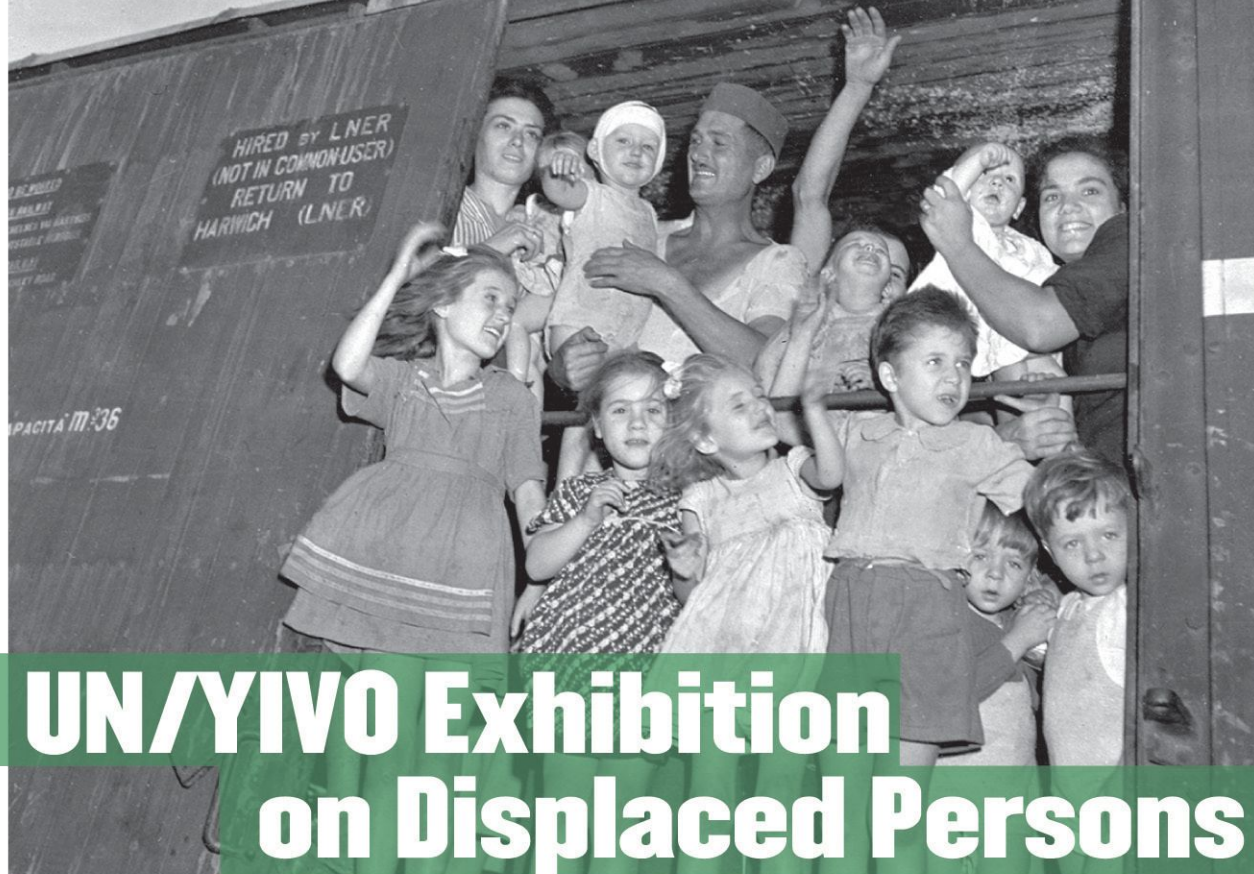
In January 2020, project leads Lilly Carrel (AHA!) and Theresa Mayfield (MMPL) initiated discussions of creating an in-person blitz to establish physical and intellectual control over MMPL's Mainland Collection. But before we could move forward, the COVID-19 pandemic caused much of Texas to be in lockdown. Several months later, in advance of American Archives Month in October, we resumed discussions of hosting a blitz. Because an in-person event was still not possible, we adapted the idea for a virtual setting and chose the Texas City Oral History Project as the new initiative.

A successful archives blitz has meaningful, tangible outcomes for both the host institution and volunteers.

Started in 1979, the Texas City Oral History Project documents the stories of Texas City's earliest residents, politicians, activists, and business leaders during the early- to mid-twentieth century. More than fifty interviews, conducted through the early 1990s, capture the unique and vital stories of daily life and city history, including the events and aftermath of the 1947 Texas City disaster, one of the deadliest industrial accidents in the United States.

While some oral histories are transcribed and cataloged, many are only accessible on fragile audio cassettes. Making the oral history collection accessible is a high priority for MMPL, and staff selected the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS) platform to create an online digital exhibit. OHMS, developed by the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries, is an open source, web-based application

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UN/YIVO Exhibition on Displaced Persons

Postponement Amid the Pandemic

Aleksandr Gelfand, United Nations Archives

Reclothed and in good health, these displaced children in Italy leave by freight train to a UNRRA camp, ca. 1945–1947. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives.

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly designated January 27—which is the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp—as the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. To mark this event, each January the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York organizes exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and film screenings that are open to the general public.

For 2021, the UN partnered with YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, the largest repository of materials on Eastern European Jewish civilization in the world, to curate an exhibition on displaced persons (DP) and camps for them in Europe following the end of World War II. Titled “After the End of the World: Displaced Persons and Displaced Persons Camps,” the exhibit has undergone several changes of plans since the initial idea, yet slowly and steadily, we’ve adapted other projects and the tools we do have to keep plans moving forward.

The UN Archives had plenty of materials to choose from. Two years before the founding of the United Nations in 1945,

44 allied nations created the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). In addition to providing food, clothing, medicine, and other essential goods to meet the immediate needs of nations invaded by the Axis powers, UNRRA was also deeply involved in the refugee crisis throughout Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. With the scope of the exhibit focusing on the experience of Jewish displaced persons in Europe, this part of UNRRA’s operations was the most pertinent to the project.

The Stories the Records Tell

Initially working under allied military authorities in 1944–1945, UNRRA personnel eventually took over the operation of many DP camps in Italy and the British, French, and American occupation zones of Germany and Austria. UNRRA’s mandate was to care for DPs only long enough to enable them to be repatriated; however, this was not possible in all cases. In the face of ongoing anti-Semitic violence against Holocaust survivors, as well as the trauma they experienced, many Jewish survivors either could not or did not want to return to their

countries of origin. This meant that there was a need for longer-term DP camps than originally envisioned. In managing these camps, UNRRA aimed to help and empower DPs by leaving most of the day-to-day operations of the camps to the residents themselves.

Frequent interactions with small UNRRA teams, which included welfare personnel working in these camps, presents a picture of how survivors managed their trauma as they looked to the future. For instance, a report from a camp in Austria notes that there were an average of three to five marriages a week, with the brides usually only 16 or 17 years old. The purported cause was that the women were afraid to be alone and therefore married earlier than they normally would have. The report goes on to mention that due to a lack of kosher food, dozens of individuals staged a protest and refused to eat, emphasizing the importance of their faith even if that meant that they had to continue exposing themselves to deprivation.

In addition to camp management, UNRRA made a major effort to reunite unaccompanied children and separated

adults with their families. A flood of letters soon followed from those looking for news and attempting to establish a line of communication with their loved ones: a Connecticut man trying to reunite with his fiancé; a New Yorker trying to get in touch with his wife to tell her that their only son had been killed in the Battle of Iwo Jima; a Bolivian trying to locate his nephew, the only survivor in his family from Dachau Concentration Camp, in order to adopt him; and from Texas, Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, the future US president, writing on behalf of a Jewish constituent looking for his cousin.

In 1948, with the liquidation of UNRRA, records from hundreds of offices around the world, including many that dealt with DP operations, were transferred to the United States and donated to the neonate United Nations Archives. Estimated at more than 50 million pages at the time of transfer, the archives spent the following decades working on the massive collection, finally opening it to the public in the 1970s. It has since remained the most popular collection and is frequently consulted by researchers from around the world.

Curating in Quarantine

At the start of 2020, exhibition team members from the United Nations and YIVO had a chance to meet twice to plan the exhibit before COVID-19 forced people into quarantine. Once in lockdown, the group met via Zoom and Microsoft Teams to discuss how the project might still proceed. Luckily, a decade-long project with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, which saw the digitization of approximately 750,000 pages of UNRRA records, had recently been completed and were made available via the UN Archives' public catalog. Many of these records were particularly relevant to the exhibit, giving us a way forward. Similarly, YIVO had a large quantity of pertinent materials digitally available. Exhibition planning for January 2021 could proceed, with the hope that a physical exhibit might be possible.

We created a folder on Google Drive for the exhibit and team members from both UN and YIVO began uploading items of potential interest. Months were spent going through the textual records with the appropriate items selected. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the 10,000 UNRRA

photographs had been digitized, making the trip to the office a necessity at some point. Since a large amount of descriptive metadata on the photographs was being cleaned-up while working from home, we were able to note photos of particular interest for the exhibition. In May 2020, when the worst point of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York passed, we began making excursions into the office to digitize photographs that could be selected for the exhibit. By fall, the exhibit planning was well advanced with goals for wall dimensions and panel placement being prepared.

Even the Best-Laid Plans . . .

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has made a physical exhibit still unsafe in early 2021. We decided to postpone the exhibit until January 2022, carrying over our plans into the next year. Although the exhibition is not opening when we expected, this experience demonstrates what can be accomplished using the resources and technology on hand that allow us to remain connected and working. This year certainly has taught us the value of taking each month at a time and the strategy of building flexibility into our plans. ■

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What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

A Provenance Story of Accumulators, Maintainers, and Users

Jennifer King, George Washington University

All archivists can cite examples of collections that successfully dodged dumpsters until finding safety in a home institution. In 2018, George Washington University Special Collections acquired the Mary Fairfax family papers and Louis R. Stockstill papers, a collection with such an elaborate journey that I felt an obligation and an eagerness to expand our usual acquisition notes to include a chain of custody that tallied eight known transfers—or returns—of ownership in the last three centuries and residence in three states before returning to Washington, DC. Only an expanded custodial history note could describe the numerous rescues, multiple returns, ownership by creators, cousins, and neighbors, and the growth and shrinkage of a collection with materials more than 195 years old.

Accumulators, Maintainers, and Users

Some of my motivation for this expanded note came from American historian Honor Sachs, who wrote: “Scholars . . . seldom question the broader processes by which such evidence came to be saved, placed in an archive, cataloged by a professional.” Sachs suggests that “a fuller understanding of archival history and practice can help provide scholars with a richer understanding of their own subjects.”¹ In addition to a desire to assist future users, I also was motivated by a desire to share this story with colleagues who would appreciate this wildly serendipitous provenance journey.

As I reflected upon the expansion of the provenance note, I read articles by archivists who have interrogated,

reconsidered, and augmented the principle of provenance. Canadian archivist Jennifer Douglas, for example, encourages expanding the provenance record to document roles beyond record creator(s) to include those she defines as accumulator, maintainer, and user.² All these roles are evident in this collection's journey to GW.

In his 2006 *Archival Science* article, Tom Nesmith argues that “[p]eople make and archive



A concert bill from 1869 included in Mary Fairfax's papers in box 2, folder 6. Courtesy of George Washington University.

records in social settings for social purposes.”³ He celebrates the social origins of document creation and use. Following Nesmith's lead, I also wanted to go beyond describing travels and ownership and explain how personal relationships led to the collection's movements, material losses, and material gains.

From Family to Neighbor

The social circumstances to highlight in this collection start with loving cousins and include the first non-family owner of the Fairfax House who believed in its historic importance and faithfully protected the family papers abandoned when the house was sold. Eventually, this owner gave the papers to her neighbor, a journalist, along with an obligation to ensure that the papers would “some day be published and become part of the historical record of the period they cover.”⁴

Finally, the neighbor's niece, the collection's final owner, was encouraged to donate it to an archival repository. A

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In the grip of the global COVID-19 pandemic, numerous special collections and archives mobilized to document the consequential impacts of the virus on their communities. These types of documentation projects and the resulting collections created by them have been and will continue to be vital for researchers in telling frank, true stories and experiences.

Miami University (MU) Libraries' Walter Havighurst Special Collections and University Archives in Oxford, Ohio, accepted the challenge of collecting these experiences for its community and worked to create an archives that would bear witness to the events of 2020 and beyond. Our project began in March by asking the Miami community to document their lives during the pandemic. We called for diaries, journals, and photographs, encouraging potential contributors to submit anonymously and/or request an embargo period if they wished to remain private for a set period of time.

Because our project was not attached to any classes, we could not be sure that there would be enough interest or submissions to create even a small collection. One of the first things we created was a call for volunteers to gauge the level of public interest in the project. The call included a form to gather contact information of volunteers that we used to ensure they fit the audience of our project.

Ongoing Communication

Throughout the planning process, we wanted to make sure that we had multiple points of communication with our volunteers. We started with a call for volunteers on the libraries' website (<https://www.lib.miamioh.edu/2020/03/30/documenting-COVID-19-Pandemic.html>) with a prominent link to it from MU's homepage, which broadened the project's visibility and reach to the overall Miami community. The webpage also became the main point of contact with the public, where volunteers could see responses to frequently asked questions.

We emailed our volunteers regularly during the first six months of the project, keeping them informed and answering any questions that might apply to everyone. Using graphics designed in-house, we shared major updates about the project on the Walter Havighurst's Instagram account as well as the Miami University Libraries' social media accounts. Subject liaison librarians shared the project with their faculty before the end of the semester to give them and their students the chance to contribute. In April, our call for volunteers was highlighted by the university's weekly newsletter. The opportunity to contribute was also featured in the county newspaper, which learned of the project through word of mouth.

The most challenging parts of communicating with volunteers were keeping pace with the need for updates as the project

Archiving a Community's Resilience during a Pandemic

Rachel Makarowski, Kimberly Hoffman,
Carla Myers, and Jacqueline Johnson,
Miami University

evolved and making these interactions both sustainable and equitable for the project managers. We received some of the expected questions, such as determining whether a person qualified as part of the targeted community and if they were journaling "the right way." To our surprise, we were asked by potential donors if we would accept ephemera (e.g., handwritten signs), and we had to decide as a group that, due to space constraints, we would not. Some participants required more frequent correspondence than others, which provided the unique opportunity to create a relationship with those community members and get to know them beyond their submissions.

Legal Considerations

It was immediately apparent that this project would have copyright considerations to address. We also wanted participants to be cognizant of privacy considerations related to the information they might include in submissions. For instance, diaries and journals may reference medical considerations or personal beliefs or thoughts that would be open to the public after the selected embargo period. When preparing materials for the project, participants also needed to consider the rights of others. For example, they might use third-party copyrighted works in their submissions, such as a clipping from a magazine, or they might disclose others' personal information such as health information, when writing about or including pictures of friends and family.

Fortunately, the library has a close relationship with MU's Office of General Counsel, and we worked with them to develop a license that addressed these considerations as well as others, including:

1. A grant of copyright, through which participants granted Miami University an irrevocable, nonexclusive, worldwide, royalty-free right and license to reproduce, publicly perform, publicly display, and transmit all journals, diaries, writings, recordings, or other works they submitted as part of the project.
2. Confirmation that they had obtained permission from all persons and entities who are identified, depicted, or otherwise referred to in works they submitted, including those relating to publicity, privacy, and intellectual property.
3. A Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) release to cover the use of any works students may have created for this project as part of coursework.
4. A privacy release acknowledging that all private and personal materials within their submissions, including their name, health issues, personal beliefs, and personal thoughts, will

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PART
1

The Key Question: Are Papers Closed Under a Donor Agreement Subject to FOIA?

Aprille McKay, Bentley Historical Library

Four years ago, just after Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election, immigration rights lawyer Hassan M. Ahmad filed a Freedom of Information request to access a closed portion of the collection of John Tanton at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library.¹ Ahmad was interested in the papers because Tanton had created a network of organizations, including the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), that had shaped the immigration rhetoric and tactics of the Trump administration. The Southern Poverty Law Center calls FAIR a hate group. The Bentley's mission is to collect materials pertaining to the state of Michigan, its institutions, and its social, economic, and intellectual development, and Tanton's personal papers were targeted because of his prominence as a Michigan-based, right-wing activist.

The Tanton collection was first processed and made available in 1984, but Tanton made additions to the collection over time. When Tanton donated the last installment in 2010, he insisted that it be closed for twenty-five years. Under Tanton's gift agreement, the final ten feet of the twenty-five-foot collection are closed until 2035. Tanton died in 2019.

The university's Freedom of Information Office denied Ahmad's request based on the donor agreement, a decision Ahmad challenged in court. At the trial court, the parties didn't get to the point of doing discovery—the process of exchanging information about the witnesses and evidence they'll present—let alone presenting evidence. Instead, the university filed a motion to dismiss Ahmad's complaint and the trial court agreed that Ahmad didn't have a case under Michigan law, even if he could prove what he claimed. Ahmad appealed and after several years of legal wrangling,

the case was argued before the Michigan Supreme Court on January 6, 2021.²

What Defines a Public Record

The issue argued was whether the documents sought by Ahmad are within the definition of "public record" as found in Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (Mi-FOIA). If donated records are subject to Mi-FOIA and an exemption does not apply, then archives that are part of a public body in Michigan can no longer honor donor agreements that include a provision that delays access for a period of time.³ Under the Michigan statute, a "public record" is "a writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created."⁴

The need for a definition of public records is found in the statutory "purpose clause": "It is the public policy of this state that all persons . . . are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees, consistent with this act. The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process."⁵

The university argued that to meet the definition of "public record" a writing must be "prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body" and the public body must be engaged "in the performance of an official function" distinct from the preparation, ownership, use, possession, or retention of the document. Interpreting the statute this way would promote the statute's goal to provide "information regarding the affairs of government." Ahmad argued that if the legislature had intended that papers acquired, retained, and used by public institutions should not be subject to Mi-FOIA, then it

should have explicitly carved out an exception for archives in the statute.

The university's position was supported by an amicus brief filed by the Association of College and Research Libraries, the American Historical Association, Association of College and Research Libraries, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the libraries of the universities of Illinois, Iowa, and California.⁶ The Society of American Archivists (SAA) Council, upon a recommendation from its Committee on Public Policy, decided not to sign on to the brief. Instead, the SAA Council recommended that SAA support educational programming about the case.⁷

A decision is expected before July 31, 2021. ■

Notes

¹ John Tanton Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhlead/umich-bhl-861056>.

² The hearing was just an hour or so before the storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC.

³ Because of the posture of the case, the applicability of exemptions has not yet been considered.

⁴ Michigan Compiled Laws 15.242, Section 13(i), <https://tinyurl.com/8wpkww7w>.

⁵ Michigan Compiled Laws 15.232, Section 1(2), <https://tinyurl.com/y7hdj6vk>.

⁶ "Amicus Brief of Association of Research Libraries, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Historical Association, American Council of Learned Societies, University of California Libraries, University of Illinois Library, and University of Iowa Libraries, in Support of Defendant-Appellant," September 30, 2020, <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020.09.30-ahmad-v-university-of-michigan-amicus-brief.pdf>.

⁷ Society of American Archivists Council Meeting, Agenda Item V.B., August 3, 2020, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0820-V-B-COPP-AhmadvUMich.pdf>.

PART 2

Do Private Interests Override Public Obligations?

Eira Tansey, University of Cincinnati

The amicus brief filed by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) is a high-profile milestone in *Ahmad v. University of Michigan*.¹ The brief argues that a public institution that has acquired a private collection must be able to maintain donor restrictions on it, otherwise “[t]he flow of records into state-run archives would slow as the archives could no longer guarantee to donors that they could protect the sensitive information contained in these records.”²

Ahmad v. University of Michigan—and those arguing on behalf of the university’s position—embodies a longstanding conflict in our profession between private interests and public obligations. Although many archivists argue that this case is about honoring short-term donor relations to enable long-term capacity to acquire sensitive materials, this argument has the potential for serious unintended consequences.

Archivists who argue that a donor’s private papers are a different form of archival documentation from an institution’s administrative records are correct insofar as professional archival practice distinguishes between personal papers and organizational records. But those who argue that this professional distinction merits additional legal privilege—by arguing that state public records laws should not apply to privately sourced materials in the custody of public institutions—are advocating for an argument that contributes to the privatization of public resources.

Private Interests and Public Access

An instructive recent controversy involving private papers held by a public university occurred when the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas acquired the Gabriel García Márquez papers in late 2014. When the Associated Press (AP) asked the Harry Ransom Center for the collection’s purchase price, the center declined to release the information. AP filed a public records request for the purchase contract, and the university refused to release the records pending a decision from the Texas Attorney General. The Attorney General ruled that the information must be disclosed, and the

center reported it had paid \$2.2 million for the collection.

The Harry Ransom Center justified its initial refusal to share the purchase price by citing the uncertainties of the manuscripts marketplace. Director Stephen Enniss said, “Protecting the confidentiality of sale prices of cultural property, which is the practice followed by the vast majority of the Ransom Center’s research library peers, would have allowed the center to compete on equal footing in the highly competitive marketplace for major archives.” In contrast, the Attorney General’s finding stated, “We find you have failed to demonstrate [that] the release of the information at issue would cause specific harm to the university’s marketplace interests.”³

Many archivists argue that the privileging of private interests is an acceptable short-term trade-off in balancing short-term donor interests with long-term public access. But such an argument obscures the fact that archives in public institutions that accommodate donor restrictions are using publicly funded resources that normalize a hierarchy in which private interests are prioritized first. Privately sourced archives housed at public universities presumably are stored in buildings supported with public funds, processed by public employee archivists, and supported by the same collection management systems used to manage other materials open to the public.

Reevaluating Access and Donor Processes

Although the Tanton papers at the center of the *Ahmad v. University of Michigan* case were donated and not purchased, the Harry Ransom Center argument defending its secrecy around the Márquez acquisition echoes the concerns of the ARL amicus brief around the “market” for manuscripts materials. The argument is that public university repositories are at a competitive disadvantage with private university repositories, because public institutions subject to state public records laws may not be able to enforce collection restrictions or acquisition information to the same degree

as private institutions. To which one might say, “So what?”

It is a curious form of archival exceptionalism to argue that archivists should generally adhere to the values of transparency, but that such a value can be suspended when it becomes inconvenient for collection acquisitions. The argument that secrecy is an essential part of the archival process is a hypothetical claim that requires a high burden of proof.

As SAA stated in its review of the Márquez case five years ago, “SAA recognizes the challenge for archival institutions in making decisions when there is a need to balance competing interests of protecting information and ensuring transparency. We affirm our belief that, whenever possible, we support the public’s fundamental right to full and complete information regarding the operation of public agencies.”

Archivists working in public institutions should reconsider our approach to donor restrictions on materials: rather than promising restrictions that we have no assurance of delivering, we should stop taking collections that we cannot make available immediately pending reasonable time for staff processing. This transition is critical not only to managing donor expectations, but also to honoring the general expectations and obligations that public institutions have to the public. ■

Notes

¹ In full disclosure, I donated records from my late grandmother’s involvement in the Older Women’s League, a now-defunct feminist organization, to the Bentley Library in 2011. I was very happy with the way my donation was handled, and no restrictions were negotiated during the process.

² “Amicus Brief of Association of Research Libraries, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Historical Association, American Council of Learned Societies, University of California Libraries, University of Illinois Library, and University of Iowa Libraries, in Support of Defendant-Appellant,” September 30, 2020, <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020.09.30-ahmad-v-university-of-michigan-amicus-brief.pdf>.

³ Jim Vertuno, “Texas Paid \$2.2M for García Márquez Archive,” *Associated Press*, February 25, 2015, <https://apnews.com/article/793321b405b6422d91337a6b8b8d6006>.

The proposed expansion in the definition of what constitutes a record subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) law in the *Ahmad v. University of Michigan* case is dependent on the exact wording of Michigan state law and the subsequent judicial cases in Michigan interpreting that law. The final decision in the case will therefore directly affect only Michigan public institutions.

But *Ahmad* is a good reminder that all laws, both federal and state, are often not as clear as we would hope. The danger, therefore, is that a successful outcome for the plaintiffs in this Michigan case might encourage plaintiffs in other states (and in the federal courts) to initiate similar challenges to common understandings of the scope of FOI law when there is not a clear library and archives exception in existing legislation.

Reasons for Restricted Access

At first glance, this might not be such a bad thing. Archivists, after all, believe in open accessibility to records. SAA's Code of Ethics, for example, states that "archivists actively promote open and equitable access to records in their care as much as possible. They strive to minimize restrictions and maximize ease of access."¹ FOI laws can be a useful tool to facilitate access to records that are not otherwise accessible via standard archival procedures. For that reason, archivists have spoken out in support of broad freedom of information laws, most notably in SAA's 2015 issue brief on "State Freedom of Information Laws."²

The problem with *Ahmad* is that its radical reinterpretation of what constitutes a government record would in the end decrease the availability of records and damage the diversity of the historical record. Although archivists

believe strongly that records should be accessible to the public, we also recognize that there are times when we have to accept donated records that come with temporary access restrictions. The primary reason we do this is to ensure that private papers are indeed donated rather than destroyed. As one legal commentator on the subject has correctly noted, "Archivists fear the smell of burnt letters."³

The Loss of Materials Without Protections

The amicus brief by Jonathan Band on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries and others details many of the important archival collections that were destroyed by their owners or heirs.⁴ He also identifies a number of important collections that have been preserved because their donors were comforted by the fact that they could impose limited restrictions on their gifts that, although limiting accessibility in the short term, ensured that the material would eventually be made available. Expansive FOI laws can be a blunt instrument that upsets the delicate balance between archivists' desire for openness and the desire of some donors for time-limited privacy.

The protections that donor-imposed restrictions afford are especially important

when dealing with material that is controversial or from groups that are outside the mainstream. Archivists have gone so far as to try to prevent access via subpoenas issued by agencies investigating alleged communist sympathizers⁵ and alleged IRA murders.⁶ It has not been possible to establish an "archival privilege" comparable to "attorney-client" privilege that would restrict access even in the face of legal subpoenas, but archivists do promise to potential donors that we will otherwise limit access for a period of time to the best of our ability.

If the *Ahmad* argument was broadly adopted in other states, public institutions in those states would no longer be able to promise that material would be

temporarily restricted. Without the possibility of a limited embargo on access, it is certain that many potential

Expansive FOI laws can be a blunt instrument that upsets the delicate balance between archivists' desire for openness and the desire of some donors for time-limited privacy.

donors would at best hold onto collections themselves, with the likely loss of important components over the years or, at worst, destroy the material.

Some non-archivists have suggested that private institutions would step up and accept restricted collections that would otherwise go to public institutions.⁷ Archivists know, however, that our capacity to absorb the permanently valuable record of our society is already limited. There is no excess capacity in private institutions that would allow them to assume the archival collecting activities of public repositories. They would instead "cherry-pick" the most high-profile and appealing possible donations, declining in the process to accept records documenting groups that have been underrepresented or marginalized.

The protections that donor-imposed restrictions afford are especially important when dealing with material that is controversial or from groups that are outside of the mainstream.

A Line Crossed

As the issue brief on state FOI laws says, “All state records laws should define the records of publicly elected officials, state employees (such as those employed by public universities), and other government employees (including governors, legislative representatives, judges, and their staffs) as government records, subject to government records and freedom of information laws.” But to suggest that the records of private citizens acting in a private capacity become government records when they are donated to a state institution is a step too far and will only lead to the impoverishment of the historical record. ■

Notes

- ¹ Society of American Archivists, “SAA Core Values and Code of Ethics,” March 29, 2012, https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics#code_of_ethics.
- ² Society of American Archivists, “Issue Brief: State Freedom of Information Laws,” September 14, 2015, <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/issue-brief-state-freedom-of-information-laws>.
- ³ Mary Sarah Bilder, “The Shrinking Back: The Law of Biography,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1992): 299–360, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=916525>.
- ⁴ “Amicus Brief of Association of Research Libraries, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Historical Association, American Council of Learned Societies, University of California Libraries, University of Illinois Library, and University of Iowa Libraries, in Support of Defendant-Appellant,” September 30, 2020, <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020.09.30-ahmad-v-university-of-michigan-amicus-brief.pdf>. The brief provides an excellent overview of the history of restrictions in archives—even the lawyer representing Ahmad during the oral presentation of the case

agreed that the amicus brief raises a number of good reasons why we should respect existing practices regarding restrictions. See Michigan Supreme Court, “160012 Hassan M. Ahmad v. University of Michigan,” January 7, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0vXr2XpscE> at 38:32.

- ⁵ Harold L. Miller, “Will Access Restrictions Hold Up in Court? The FBI’S Attempt to Use the Braden Papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,” *American Archivist* 52, no. 2 (1989): 180–190, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.52.2.57607558u7j70177>.
- ⁶ Christine Anne George, “Archives Beyond the Pale: Negotiating Legal and Ethical Entanglements after the Belfast Project,” *American Archivist* 76, no. 1 (2013): 47–67, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.76.1.x34p8k7848512274>.
- ⁷ Eugene Volokh, “Want to Donate Your Papers to a University, to Be Opened Some Years Later? Donate to a Private University, Not a Public One.” *The Volokh Conspiracy* (blog), July 2, 2019, <https://reason.com/volokh/2019/07/02/want-to-donate-your-papers-to-a-university-to-be-opened-some-years-later-donate-to-a-private-university-not-a-public-one>.

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We learned many things from the oral arguments in *Ahmad v. University of Michigan*. Two stood out. First, Freedom of Information (FOI) attorneys are experts with FOI statutes, and judges are experts at interpreting law in relation to the specifics of a case. Despite their expertise and good intentions, however, none of them are archivists. Second, we should not assume that insights on FOI from another jurisdiction will be persuasive in Michigan. As the counsel for the University of Michigan learned via a bristly response, citing federal FOIA law did not carry any weight with at least one judge.

Despite widely differing opinions on this case, it is safe to say that nobody thinks years of litigation in court is the best way to address questions about access restrictions. How can we achieve a more effective public records framework for private archives at public institutions? One way is for archivists to become agenda-setters. Keeping in mind the two aforementioned points—archives aren't necessarily understood by those who work with public policy and one must know the specific laws of a jurisdiction—archivists' expertise can improve public policy, but archivists must understand the policy landscape to effect meaningful change. After all, *Ahmad v. University of Michigan* is not the first—and will not be the last—time that archivists negotiate FOI statutes.

The Landscape of Michigan's Public Records Laws

When I first learned about this case, I didn't realize how little I knew. I initially thought that making the Tanton papers subject to Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (Mi-FOIA) was inappropriate because it creates the potential for horrible, unintended consequences if closed archives at public institutions are subject to Mi-FOIA. An argument along the same lines is found in the amicus brief on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, et al.¹ My opinion was not grounded in my understanding of Michigan's public records laws, but rather my professional ethics

and concern for the individuals whose private stories are in the records. When I raised these concerns with a lawyer friend well-versed in Mi-FOIA, the response was to counter those concerns by asserting that the sensitive information could remain closed because of existing Mi-FOIA exemptions: *Exemption (a)* about privacy, *Exemption (o)* about archaeological sites, and others.

The legal scholar may be correct. It may be technically possible to honor the terms of the donor agreement with this procedural mechanism. But relying on non-archives-specific public records FOI exemptions to enforce the conditions of a donation is not a satisfactory solution. For example, Michigan has twenty-seven exemptions to Mi-FOIA and none is specific to archives.² An archivist might wish for their institution's FOIA officer to cite *Exemption (h)* about physician-client privilege to enforce the conditions of a donor agreement or maybe *Exemption (r)* about a campaign committee. This haphazard approach, which is no sure thing when brought before the courts, produces uncertainty and muddles the work of archivists. Furthermore, we cannot be sure that FOIA statutes will include exemptions that would apply to all access restrictions in a donor agreement.

Archivists' expertise can improve public policy, but archivists must understand the policy landscape to effect meaningful change.

Another Model

A better approach is found in Kentucky, which removes the ambiguity found in Michigan by specifying, in law, that archives at public institutions are covered by one of fourteen public records exemptions: "Public or private records [. . .] having historic, literary, artistic, or commemorative value accepted by the archivist of a public

university, museum, or government depository from a donor or depositor other than a public agency."³ Archivists in Kentucky have a clear policy they can follow and articulate with their donors and researchers.

Where jurisdictions deem archives at public institutions to be subject to FOI, Kentucky's definitive exemption language would prevent the uncertainty that University of Michigan archivists are experiencing in the *Ahmad* case.⁴ Archivists can influence changes to better define the application of FOI laws to private records in public institutions. Until then, archivists must work diligently to understand the quagmire of donor relations, access restrictions, and FOI statutes that govern their work. Not only is this knowledge essential for doing the best work possible, it is the first step in zealously advocating for the interests of archivists. ■

Notes

¹ "Amicus Brief of Association of Research Libraries, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Historical Association, American Council of Learned Societies, University of California Libraries, University of Illinois Library, and University of Iowa Libraries, in Support of Defendant-Appellant." September 30, 2020, 9–11, <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020.09.30-ahmad-v-university-of-michigan-amicus-brief.pdf>.

² Michigan Compiled Laws 15. 243, Sec. 13, [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(ydma3nr5c4zr23msmmsylawt\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-15-243](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(ydma3nr5c4zr23msmmsylawt))/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-15-243).

³ Ky. Rev. Stat. 61.878(n) cited in Jeremy S. Rogers, Kentucky, *Open Government Guide*, <https://www.rcfp.org/open-government-guide/kentucky>.

⁴ Another approach is to make definitive that personal records in public institutions are not subject to FOI, as Peter Hirtle asserts on page 13 of this article. Federal agencies, such as the National Park Service, have policies based on this approach: "Donated and purchased archival collections that weren't created by a Federal agency aren't subject to FOIA," which is grounded in court precedent citing 44 USC §3301 (a)(1)(B)(i), "[a record] does not include library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes." National Park Service, "Appendix D: Museum Archives and Manuscript Collections" in *Museum Handbook (Part II)*, 80, <https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHIL/mh2appd.pdf>.



FROM THE ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES

David S. Ferriero

National Archives and Records Administration
david.ferriero@nara.gov

NARA's Presidential Libraries Update Their Museums with New Perspectives

The National Archives and Records Administration maintains thirteen museums attached to our presidential libraries, and we recognize the need to periodically update the presentation. Most recently, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, Kansas, and the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri, have undergone complete renovations. The Eisenhower Library debuted its new galleries in summer 2019, and the Truman Library will unveil its new displays when public health considerations will allow us to safely welcome visitors back to the museum.

In his book *Who Owns History?*, Eric Foner declared, "Historians view the constant search for new perspectives as the lifeblood of historical understanding." As we look at our museums, we consider the perspectives of growing scholarship and the perspectives of our changing visitor population. Truman Library Director Kurt Graham notes that we know much more about these presidents and their legacies because of the scholarship of the last twenty years. Graham and Eisenhower Library Director Dawn Hammatt both acknowledge that fewer people with a personal connection to or memory of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations visit their museums. The renovations were undertaken with the understanding that they had to reach those without preexisting knowledge of the late 1940s and 1950s.

As we've seen an increase in historical scholarship, we've also benefited from a greater understanding of how museums connect with the public. The field of museum studies has greatly changed from what it was when our original exhibits were installed. We've drawn on that expertise in designing our new exhibits and focused on the goal of making sure people who aren't scholars have a connection to our shared past.

We have different questions than we had twenty years ago, and we can use the documents and artifacts to address those questions. The two libraries also made a conscious decision to let the presidents speak directly to the visitors. At the Eisenhower Library, the guiding principle was to let Ike and Mamie speak for themselves, even asking "What would Ike say" when they got stuck. The Truman Library staff use the president's quotes and film footage throughout, trying to convey his perspective and words whenever possible.

Embarking on a complete renovation created an excellent opportunity to go back to the holdings to see what they had to tell the appropriate story. The new exhibits not only draw upon the libraries' own collections but also tap resources in the National Archives. As an example the display on D-Day at the Eisenhower Library features previously undigitized footage about D-Day planning and landing. This discovery had a twofold benefit: the exhibit now conveys the immediacy and emotion of the historical event, and these historical films are now available to the public.

An example of the way we asked different questions is in the presentation of Truman's civil rights legacy. Thirty to forty years ago, that legacy would have been overlooked, but today it is one of the main sections in the museum. Another example is the new Korean War exhibit. Where once discussion of that war was confined to a plaque, it now has its own room.

Perhaps the biggest change is in our use of technology to present information and engage visitors. The old, out-of-date electronic components are now replaced by interactives and mini-theaters. Yet we realize that we cannot rely on technology alone to tell our stories. Recognizing that visitors have different learning styles, the new museums use an assortment of ways to teach and inform. A touch-screen interactive allows a visitor to do a deep dive into the Cold War; audio recordings bring the actual words of the president to life; traditional labels give context to artifacts and documents.

In retelling the stories of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, we have tried to faithfully represent their words and deeds in a way that draws on the best scholarship and also speaks to a variety of visitors. Because new discoveries or new understanding can change the way we look at historical events, we must periodically reevaluate our museums and assess how well they are telling their stories.

"Who owns history?" asked Foner. "Everyone and no one—which is why the study of the past is a constantly evolving, never-ending journey of discovery." ■

★ 2021 SAA Election Ballot ★

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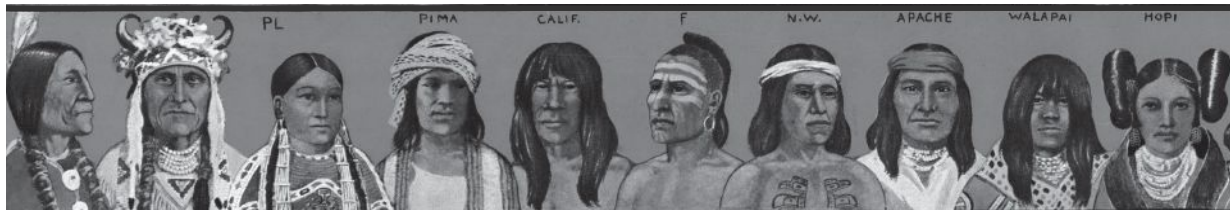
Council

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- Jasmine Jones
- Dominique Luster
- Teresa Mora
- Tonia Sutherland
- Kelly Wooten

Nominating Committee

- April Anderson-Zorn
- Alison Clemens
- Angel Diaz
- Greg McCoy
- Dave J. Moore
- Jamie Seemiller

The ballot will be open from March 31 through April 21. Voting is open to eligible SAA members. Keep an eye on the SAA website and In the Loop for more information.



More recently, new subject headings such as “First Nations of North America,” “Indigenous peoples,” and “Native Americans” are included in LCSH. The Library of Congress also suggests using the name of a specific tribe instead of a more general term for all Indigenous people. This is just one example of how metadata practices have evolved to become more inclusive.

Reparative Revisions

UTA Libraries and Special Collections are currently reevaluating their metadata practices to fit within a framework of cultural competency, or “the set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support appropriate and effective interaction in a variety of cultural contexts.”² We realize that this work can prove difficult with some of the materials we catalog and describe. Mora’s poster, for example, presents a set of unique challenges. Although Mora was more knowledgeable about Native culture than the average American, he still was not an Indigenous person nor a member of any of the tribes depicted in his artwork. His views and representations of Native American culture were very much shaped by traditional Western biases that viewed non-Europeans and people of color as exotic or “other.”

Cataloging an item involves recording its core publication information such as author, publisher, and date of

creation—elements that can usually be objectively determined. Yet catalog records should also include applicable subjects, individuals, demographic groups, and organizations. Similarly, archival description includes subjects, an abstract, scope and contents, historical context, and other information about the collection and creator. This is where the cataloger or archivist must make a conscious effort to repair the biases inherent in the item and its description.

Detail of Jo Mora’s “Indians of North America” poster, 1936.
Courtesy of University of Texas at Arlington, Special Collections.

The challenges of making reparative revisions are apparent when we examine the subject matter of Mora’s poster. Although he includes depictions of many Native tribes, he uses blanket terms like “Plains Indians,” “Northwest Coast Indians,” and “Forest Indians.” This terminology does not reflect the complex social and cultural identities of Indigenous peoples. For example, “Plains Indians” alone may collectively refer to more than thirty tribes. Even today, the Library of Congress struggles with these issues. It often falls to catalogers, archivists, and librarians to make decisions on choices of inclusion and accurate representation. Should they employ non-specific LCSH such as “Native Americans” and “American Indians” or the currently accepted terms such as “American Indian ethnohistory, Plains Indians”? Would it be more suitable to do additional research to identify the groups that the poster depicts? Is the cataloger or archivist even qualified to do this research since they may not have expertise in the subject area? These are all things that should be considered when thinking about reparative metadata.

An Ongoing Evaluation

Cataloging Mora’s poster is just one example of the type of work that UTA Libraries and Special Collections are doing. Although it may prove more time-consuming in cataloging or describing a piece like Mora’s “Indians of North America,” we are dedicated to prioritizing the accurate representation and inclusion of diverse groups. We have ultimately decided to include the standard LCSH for groups as well as identify more specific terms to battle biases and cultural misrepresentation.

This evaluative work is essential and should be completed to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. Moreover, it is also important to note that reparative archival and library work is an ongoing effort. Although we have created smaller projects to reach some of our goals, we must continually examine our efforts to maintain our commitment to equitable, diverse, and inclusive practices. ■

Notes

- ¹ Steven A. Knowlton, “Three Decades Since Prejudices and Antipathies: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings,” *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2005): 124, https://doi.org/10.1300/J104v40n02_08.
- ² Ellen Engseth, “Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States,” *American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 461, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-81.2.460>.

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How an Archives Blitz Can Benefit Your Institution

continued from page 5

that enhances searchability, indexing, and user experience (learn more at <https://www.oralhistoryonline.org>).

Onboarding Participants

MMPL's goals for the archives blitz were for participants to create the metadata displayed in the OHMS viewer interface, such as timecodes, segment title and synopsis, keywords, and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), for at least ten oral history interviews. Additionally, the blitz would be used to develop practice-based models for future projects and provide a community archiving opportunity for Houston-area students and archivists.

To begin, we prepared a test interview to work through the process and create a template and resources for participants. Eleven volunteers signed up to participate. We used Google Drive to create and provide access to project folders. Each participant received a digitized transcript and audio file, metadata template, time-keeping log, and a document to write a short biographical history note. Participants were required to attend a training session, which included an overview of the project, a tutorial on how to identify and search Library of Congress authorities, a discussion of MMPL's copyright, and advice for avoiding potentially offensive or harmful language. The blitz was held across seven days, allowing volunteers to work asynchronously

to complete their oral history descriptions. Two virtual, drop-in "office hours" were offered to answer questions, and the archives blitz wrapped up with a virtual happy hour.

Refining for Future Events

During the happy hour and in a post-event survey, volunteers provided positive and constructive feedback on their experience. Participants overwhelmingly enjoyed the blitz, indicating they would participate in another event. Survey respondents praised the project's organization and indicated they found the oral histories interesting, but noted that the project required more time than anticipated. Survey results will be used to develop best practices and strategies for future archives blitz events and the blitz-generated data will eventually be migrated to MMPL's OHMS website for public access.

The creative format of an archives blitz is a useful model for archival collaboration to accomplish reciprocal goals and foster community engagement. Plus, as a scalable event, an archives blitz can be adapted and replicated to suit a wide variety of organizational and collection contexts. Consider hosting an archives blitz for your next event! ■

The archives blitz was held across seven days, allowing volunteers to work asynchronously to complete their oral history descriptions.



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What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been continued from page 8

friend contacted a repository on her behalf and a professional relationship between archivists connected the donor to GW. As Nesmith writes, "All of these people play a role in *causing* the records we see today to exist. Their actions all have societal drivers, contexts, and impacts as well. This overall history of the record is the provenance of the record."⁵

Fairfax's Custodial History

The expansion of provenance includes three elements that provide specific structure and content guidance for this note, according to archival scholar Laura Millar. The **creator history** acknowledges those who created, accumulated, and used the records over time, the **records history** describes the physical management and movement of the records over time, and the **custodial history** outlines the transfer of ownership or custody of the records to the archival institution and the subsequent care of those records."⁶

This note also incorporates information from *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* 5.1 and 5.2.

- **Creator history:** The primary creators and accumulators of the records are Mary Allen Fairfax (née Cook), other members of the Fairfax, Cook, and Owner families, and Louis R. Stockstill. The documents' functions include activities such as interacting with family, friends, government agents, and work associates, bill paying, writing for pleasure and work, researching family history, and accumulating and sharing knowledge.
- **Records history:** Presumably, the Fairfax family maintained the records from 1823–1941 in Washington, DC. The largest portion of the Fairfax papers, letters from Mary Fairfax to her cousin Rachel Davis in New Jersey, were returned to Mary following Rachel's death in 1867. Most likely, the records remained in DC until the early 1960s. In 1941, Mary Fineran purchased the home at 235 2nd Street SE from the Fairfax estate and found the records in the house.
In several newspaper articles, Fineran recounts her neighborly

relationship with Mary Fairfax's daughters and describes the records as containing numerous writings related to the Civil War, mementos, letters, daguerreotypes, and a signed photograph of Robert E. Lee. (*The Evening Star* March 11, 1956, p. D-10, and June 25, 1960, p. 4.)

The current collection contains few writings by Mary Fairfax, no daguerreotypes, and no image of Lee. Circa 1961, in preparation for construction of the Library of Congress Madison building, the federal government condemned several blocks of businesses and homes including 235 2nd Street. Mary Fineran moved to 415 First Street SE. In 1962, she gave the family papers to her neighbor and friend Louis Stockstill.

In the mid-1960s, Stockstill researched Mary and her extended family at the National Archives and Library of Congress for a planned publication of Mary Fairfax's letters. Stockstill transcribed the letters Mary wrote to Rachel and other family members. These research materials include transcriptions and copies of government documents.

From 1963 to 2001, Stockstill occasionally wrote to staff at the Huntington Library detailing his ideas for a partnership to publish a monograph and to subsequently donate the Fairfax papers. Sometime in the 1970s, Louis and his wife Oneta moved to Indialantic, Florida.

In 2004, Louis Stockstill died, and sometime before 2018 the records moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, perhaps with Oneta Stockstill, who died in Tulsa in 2010. The final owner before donation to GW was Jan Lee, Louis Stockstill's niece.

- **Custodial history:** A local Tulsa historian and Jan Lee's neighbor suggested she donate these records to a repository. On her behalf, the historian contacted staff at the New York Public Library (NYPL) for help locating an appropriate repository. Since the Fairfax records detailed a Washington, DC, family and Louis Stockstill was a GW graduate and instructor, NYPL contacted GW Special Collections. Special Collections staff spoke with Lee and on September 4, 2018, she donated a collection containing the Fairfax

family records, the research materials created by Louis Stockstill, and Louis Stockstill's personal materials. These records, maintained as one united collection, were processed in 2019.

Combining Historical Texts with Archival Practice

Unlike other collections, the information in this note is found primarily in the collection's documents, not in an inaccessible donor file. The combination of this detailed custodial history note and the opportunity for direct use of the collection materials used to construct it supports trusted interaction between users and records.

The historian Sachs argues that to fully research a subject, users should combine interrogation of the historical texts with a study of the archival practices associated with collection arrangement, description, and storage.⁷ By interacting directly with the evidence used to write the note, this collection invites all users to join the community of creators, accumulators, and maintainers who have been building this collection for 195 years. ■

Notes

¹ Honor R. Sachs, "Reconstructing a Life: The Archival Challenges of Women's History," *Library Trends* 56, no. 3 (2008): 651, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2008.0018>.

² Jennifer Douglas, "A Call to Rethink Archival Creation: Exploring Types of Creation in Personal Archives," *Archival Science* 18 (2018): 29–49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9285-8>.

³ Tom Nesmith, "The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal-European Relations in Western Canada: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 6 (2006): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-007-9043-9>.

⁴ Louis Stockstill to Christine Kucevich, 11 September 1975. The Mary Fairfax family papers and Louis R. Stockstill papers (MS2378), Box 3 Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University, Washington DC.

⁵ Nesmith, "The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records," 359.

⁶ Laura Millar, "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 1–15, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12833>.

⁷ Sachs, "Reconstructing a Life," 650–666.

Archiving a Community's Resilience during a Pandemic

continued from page 9

be made publicly available by MU through the project and that they waive their rights to liabilities and claims that their sharing of personal information might bring.

This license was integrated into the form used by participants to submit materials they had created (see https://miamioh.formstack.com/forms/documenting_life_during_covid19_submission_form).

Preferred File Formats

The submission form listed our preferred file formats for each media type, with multiple media types possible per submission. Restricting the acceptable file formats for entries was designed to assist us with the work of preserving the journals, both by excluding difficult-to-access formats and by limiting the number of file types we'd have to maintain going forward. We requested standard, widely adopted file formats, which tend to have more support and maintainability than

niche formats. However, in order to avoid deterring potential volunteers, we made our format specifications optional.

Permissible media types included handwritten or born-digital text, photographs, video, and audio. We preferred any typed text to be delivered in a born-digital format as either a PDF or DOCX file. For photographs, we asked for the highest resolution available, preferably TIFF or JPEG2K. For video, we offered more options: AVI, MOV, QT, or motion JPEG2K. For audio, we asked for WAV format. The choice of formats was an attempt to compromise between long-term preservation requirements and convenience for volunteers.

The submission form gave volunteers the option of keeping their entries closed for up to fifty years. With such a long embargo period, it becomes even more important to select file formats that are suitable for long-term preservation. Even with this precaution, we will likely need to migrate some files to new formats in the future to ensure they remain accessible.



Miami University celebrates its community spirit with a beloved miniature of professional football coach and MU alum Weeb Ewbank. *Courtesy of Walter Havighurst Special Collections and University Archives' Instagram.*

Future of the Collection

We are still actively accepting submissions from volunteers and have no plans to stop any time soon. We hope to process the collection in the next few years and make the finding aid available using ArchivesSpace (<http://archivesspace.lib.miamioh.edu>). These journals and other materials relating to the pandemic will be made accessible to the public, in accordance with any embargo periods set by the donors on an individual basis, so that scholars may use them for research. We also hope to use them in classroom instruction and outreach opportunities. More importantly, these documents will allow readers and researchers to learn about the social mores, struggles, and events related to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Nancy P. Beaumont

nbeaumont@archivists.org

Exhaustion / Exhilaration

We've slipped into another March, and the "before times" seem so remote. I'm both exhausted and exhilarated by our transition to a new way of doing things. Our need to connect—and the relative ease of doing so virtually—has meant more frequent meetings of SAA's volunteer groups and a resultant uptick in activity. The SAA Council and the Foundation Board now meet every other month, and many of our committees, working groups, and task forces meet monthly. It's exhausting to do the research, prepare the reports, conduct the Zoom meetings, write the minutes and action lists, and do the follow-up work in time for reporting out at the next meeting. It's made all of us—volunteers and staff alike—more accountable for keeping things moving. And it's resulted in a lot of good things happening! To cite a few:

Following its recent review of the Strategic Plan, the **SAA Council** will commit the time and talents of its own Internal Working Group on DEI to the following task: "By May 31 . . . draft a work plan for incorporating diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and cultural competency into all aspects of SAA's work." SAA has most assuredly—and intentionally—become a more welcoming and accessible organization over the years. But this much-needed focus by the Council on creating an actionable plan provides the best chance for SAA's success. I know that the next executive director will benefit from having a plan in place as a path forward.

The **SAA Foundation Board** hopes to broaden its membership with its recent call for volunteers to serve on the Board (<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-foundation-board-of-directors/volunteer-for-saa-foundation-board>). Check out the FAQs for Board service and volunteer by April 15! And Foundation committees are currently selecting a development

consultant to assist in setting a direction for sustainable growth, reviewing Strategic Growth Fund grant proposals, and making timely decisions on requests for Archival Workers Emergency Fund support.

We've long aspired to broadening accessibility to our Digital Archives Specialist and A&D certificate programs. SAA Education recently announced that core courses are now available online in a new on-demand format (<https://www2.archivists.org/news/2021/take-your-next-saa-ad-or-das-certificate-course-online-in-a-new-on-demand-format>). Behind this announcement is significant revision and updating of courses on grant writing, copyright, and privacy and confidentiality (for starters), each taught by an expert practitioner and consisting of multiple video presentations, slides, exercises, and a course exam. Our thanks to the **Committee on Education and Digital Archives Specialist Subcommittee** and to Gina Minks and Joshua Kitchens, our instructors for these first offerings.

The **Membership Committee's** very active subcommittees on the Mentoring Program, Key Contacts, and Career Development have made great strides. Be sure to check out SAA's new Career Services Commons, a permanent online space for SAA members to access and offer career advising sessions, mock interviews, and résumé review services (<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/career-services-commons>). Now all members—including those who can't attend the Annual Meeting and its onsite Career Center—will have access to these services year-round.

We're delighted that Laura Millar, author of SAA/ALA's acclaimed *A Matter of Facts: The Value of Evidence in an Information Age*, will participate in our fifth annual One Book, One Profession reading initiative. The **Publications Board** is sponsoring a free online event on March 25 featuring

Millar and panelists Valencia Johnson, Geoffrey Yeo, Louis Jones, and SAA Publications Editor Stacie Williams. We hope you'll join in this book discussion to consider why archives matter today and how we can—and must—convince the world of their value! Register on the SAA home page and, if you'd like to conduct your own book group, visit <https://www2.archivists.org/one-book-one-profession-2020-2021> for a study guide and tips on facilitating a reading group.

Beginning with the Spring/Summer 2021 issue, we will publish **American Archivist** in an entirely digital format. This tough decision by the SAA Council acknowledges the ever-increasing production expenses of print (e.g., paper costs, fuel surcharges) and the impact of the pandemic on distribution and budgets. The good news is that we migrated all journal content to a new, much friendlier digital platform late last year. I love print as much as anyone. (At one point, I wanted to be a pressman so that I could spend my days steeped in the fragrance of ink on paper.) But this is a necessary step in responsibly stewarding SAA's resources.

I could go on and on—as I often do—about the excellent and exciting work of the **Committee on Public Awareness** (with its *ArchivesAWARE!* blog), the team producing the charming **Archives in Context** podcast, the **Committee on Public Policy** (which is continuously at work monitoring the public policy landscape and preparing issue briefs), the **Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment** (SAA Dataverse, anyone?), the **2021 Program Committee**, the **A*CENSUS II Working Group**, and others. Instead, I'll ask you to keep your eye on the SAA home page, *In The Loop*, the Announcements List, and your section lists for updates on SAA's many and varied activities labors of love. ■

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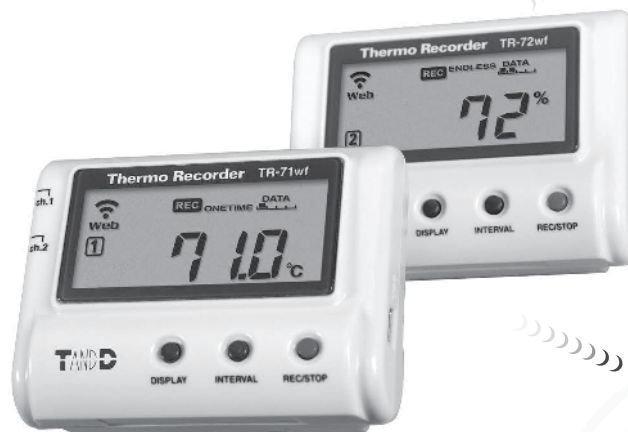
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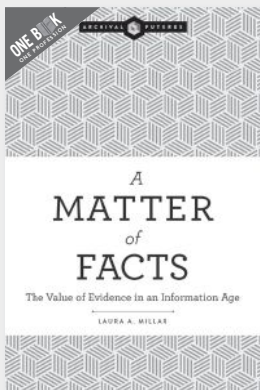
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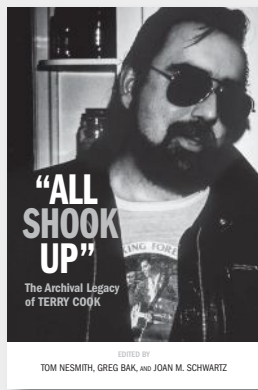
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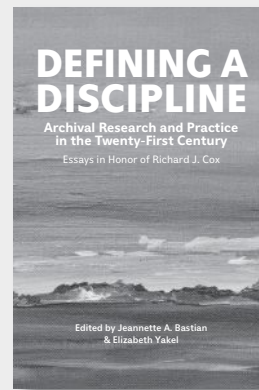
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