

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
January 25 - 27, 2012
Chicago, Illinois**

**Occupy Wall Street Archives and Libraries
(Prepared by: Terry Baxter)**

BACKGROUND

SAA's Strategic Priority #2: Diversity, includes this desired outcome:

Desired Outcome #2: Identify and promote existing models and develop new methods for assisting archives and archivists to diversify the documentary record within their repositories and to promote archives to diverse communities.

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) archives and libraries were formed as internal resources both to document OWS life as well as to serve the information needs of their communities. A group of SAA members under the leadership of the Issues and Advocacy Roundtable has been working to document both the collections of OWS and the confiscation/destruction of libraries and/or archives by state agents.

While the activities under the desired outcome are useful – conference sessions, workshops, and outreach – the SAA Council should take more direct action when archives documenting underrepresented communities are threatened.

DISCUSSION

The desire to document the OWS movement has been discussed on the Archives and Archivists list, on several constituent groups' lists (Issues and Advocacy, Human Rights Archives), and on the SAA Council list. Most of the discussion has centered on ideas for insuring that the movement is documented and that nascent archives and library collections are identified and preserved. Libraries (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_People%27s_Library) and archives (<http://www.theawl.com/2011/12/the-struggle-for-the-occupy-wall-street-archives>) began organically in several Occupy locations, with the New York location being the most fully developed.

On November 15, 2011, several cities used law enforcement and other staff to clear OWS camps. In New York one of the largest libraries (5,000+ volumes) and part of the camp's archives were confiscated by city personnel. While initial reports indicated that confiscated items would be made available to OWS library staff, this did not turn out to

be accurate. A large portion of the library and all onsite archival materials had been destroyed.

Two days later, the American Library Association issued a statement (<http://ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pr.cfm?id=8568>) condemning the actions of the city. The SAA Council discussed the issue online and decided that no action should be taken. Based on some discussions among several roundtable leaders and Council member Terry Baxter, a group was formed both to identify existing OWS archives and to track any actions taken against them by state agents. That group has more than 40 members and has been working since November 18.

The role of SAA with regard to purportedly legal actions of government officials is not clear. On one hand, interference with law enforcement activities could expose SAA to negative reactions from the public and government officials. On the other hand, SAA is the professional association that advocates for archives and archivists. The purposeful destruction of archives (and libraries) by government officials would seem to warrant the official registration of concern.

One of archivists' core values (<http://www2.archivists.org/statements/core-values-of-archivists>) is social responsibility. While SAA has no responsibility to initiate direct physical action to protect archives, it should at least be willing to advocate for the protection of all archival records and to officially protest their destruction through both intentional and careless actions.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the SAA Council appoint a Council member to serve as liaison to the working group led by the Issues and Advocacy Roundtable and to report to the Council at its August 2012 meeting about the status of OWS archives and libraries, and

THAT the SAA Council review the Strategic Priority related to Diversity to determine whether formalized methods for protesting the destruction of archives of under-represented groups should be included.

Support Statement: SAA has a responsibility to support the broadest archival record possible. It also has a responsibility to show solidarity with its sister professions. Determining the proper response to the destruction of the People's Library is useful in this specific instance and can also provide guidance for future issues.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: The review of Strategic Priority #2 related to diversity might indicate changes to the desired outcomes and activities supporting it.

Fiscal Impact: None.