

Roberta I Murray: Discovering Her Names in the Archival Records

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Abstract:

Women in archival records may be identified by their husband's name. The Yale Library Reparative Archival Description Working Group has led an effort to identify women by their full name. This issue becomes even more complicated when a woman divorces and remarries as I found out researching the RISD Museum of Art's Educational Director and Acting Museum Director Roberta Alford (1945-1952). She appears in our records first as Roberta Fansler Alford and then Roberta Murray Alford.

Married three times due to divorce and the death of her second husband, I found multiple authority file entries for her.

The authorities do not list all of her name forms. As you can imagine, these name changes complicate research efforts. Online name authorities do not cross reference the name variations. I will discuss the challenges I faced researching her life, the inadequacies of name authorities, the difficulties encountered creating a ArchivesSpace agent record, and how other Alford researchers have handled this issue. While men have changed their names by choice, women's names have changed due to society's expectations. While those expectations have certainly changed during my lifetime, the challenges they present remain.

About the author:

Doug Doe became an archivist through Jim O'Toole's program at UMass/Boston during the late 80s and early 90s, a time of MARC AMC and Hensen's APPM. After a contingent position at the Art and Architecture Thesaurus, he received a position at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1997 then developing a new archives program thanks to a NHPRC grant. He became RISD's Digital Archivist in 2018 because of the efforts of then Dean of Libraries Lareese Hall.

He has participated in the development of the Rhode Island Archives and Manuscripts Collections online consortium since its inception in 2006. He recently completed a one and half year migration to ArchivesSpace after 26 years of FileMaker pro. And he serves as the current President of the New England Archivists.