

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 14–16, 2016
Chicago, Illinois**

**SAA Archives Update
(Prepared by SAA President Nancy McGovern)**

BACKGROUND

On November 9, I visited the SAA Archives at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. I met with SAA Archivist Abigail Nye, who provided an overview of the archives, including its scope and practices, and a tour.

UPDATE

The university archives and special collections is also a branch of the Wisconsin Historical Society. As a branch, they have the only inter-archives loan program in the nation that provides records on request between branches. Their collecting areas include: the history of the archival profession in the US, including SAA's archives, MAC's archives, and the papers of prominent archivists; the brewing history of Milwaukee; and social justice, including under-documented communities. SAA members are the most frequent requestors of the SAA archives. Common requests are for photos and information for anniversaries and historical milestones. See the excerpt from the SAA archives finding aid (below) on the founding of the archives. The archives were processed while in Madison. The arrangement is detailed and somewhat complex, with topics appearing in multiple places, but archivists get to know where to look. Nye's predecessor, Michael Doyle, worked on the finding aid and the records schedule with Brad Houston, the Records Officer. The physical archives is stored onsite and users can get access to records within ten minutes of requesting them.

They provide digitization on demand to support remote research requests. When I visited, archives staff were digitizing records of the Status of Women Committee for Alex Poole, a frequent user of the SAA archives. They do not add digitized content for research requests, but the recently-digitized oral histories are now part of the digital collection. The SAA archives has acquired some digital records, including a regular crawl of the SAA website using Archive-It and digital records that go through e-records processing as other collections do. They use a homegrown system that combines mostly open source tools. They are working on a pilot to implement the Alma system for the archives to include content listings. They are not engaging in digital preservation yet, but they do manage preservation and access copies separately.

Some of the ideas we talked about included:

- Identifying possible connections between their social justice collections and the SAA Archives
- Increasing outreach to SAA members to raise awareness about the archives.
- Creating a timeline of SAA milestones that could integrate with the website.
- Provide a regular or periodic sidebar in *Archival Outlook* to highlight a photo or document about something in SAA's history – “Did you know ...”
- A guest blog post for *Off the Record* about the SAA Archives (tentatively January).
- An online exhibit, possibly on diversity and inclusion activities over time, that highlights milestones and heroes.
- Possible examples from SAA archives for DAS classes.

Founding of the SAA Archives

For context, this is an excerpt from the SAA Archives finding aid:¹

Provision for long-term preservation of SAA's records was originally made by section 21 of its constitution (1936), which reads:

The minute books, correspondence, and other records of the Society and its committees shall be preserved by the officers and chairmen of the committees and shall be promptly turned over by them to the secretary when their terms expire. Records that have ceased to be of use in conducting the current affairs of the Society may, by direction of the council, be turned over to a depository selected by it for permanent preservation.

Until Council designated a depository in the 1960s, the records migrated with each new secretary, who was expected to maintain control over them. This arrangement was manageable when the records amounted to only a few feet, but it proved impractical as their bulk increased. Complicating the situation was the fact that officers and committee chairs were slow in turning over non-active records. When records were passed to the secretary, they often lacked any order. In his report at the annual meeting, Secretary Henry Browne remarked the "exciting arrival" of several boxes from his predecessor, archivist at the Ford Motor Company. The boxes "looked like a do-it-yourself kit for maintaining a Thunderbird," he joked. "They proved to be the archives of the Society."

Dolores Renze, Colorado State Archivist, was the first secretary to make preservation and processing of the records an ongoing priority. During her term, the archives grew substantially. However, like Browne before her, Renze complained that many past presidents and committee chairs declined to turn over their files, and those who did were "most dilatory in applying [to their own records] the principles of preservation and arrangement which they propound" as professional archivists.

On October 2, 1963, Council resolved that "the archives of the Society be deposited in the official custody of an appointed archivist" and that they "be processed, housed, and serviced in conformance with sound archival principles." Upon completing her term as secretary, Renze was appointed as the first SAA archivist, and the Colorado State Archives designated as the official depository.

¹ See Custodial History: <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=wiarchives;cc=wiarchives;view=reslist;rgn=main;didno=uw-mil-uwmms0172;subview=standard;focusrgn=admininfo;byte=46036792>

On December 30, 1969, Council determined that it was again desirable to place the records under the care of the secretary. Accordingly, President Kahn informed Renze that the records were to be placed in the custody of Gerald F. Ham and placed on deposit at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (now Wisconsin Historical Society) in Madison. Almost two years later, Ham reported that the records had yet to be sent, and Council made arrangements to assist Renze in delivering the records.

During a January 1976 Council meeting, it was reported that the "greatest volume of the Society's archives" were on deposit at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, although "there were additional segments of the records in the custody of several former SAA officers." Councilor J. Frank Cook chaired a committee to collect records of SAA's first forty years, but it yielded few results. During this time, Council began emphasizing the importance of designating a permanent depository, believing that such action would encourage officers and chairs to transfer inactive records.

On October 2, 1978, Council accepted the offer of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Archives, to serve as the permanent depository of SAA's archives and appointed Cook as SAA archivist. Cook and the UW-Madison staff provided access to and preserved the records until Cook's retirement in September 2000. At that time, Council donated its archives to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) Libraries and named the head of its Archives Department as SAA archivist. The records arrived at Milwaukee in April 2001. Section 7 of the SAA Constitution currently provides for the placement and preservation of the SAA archives.