

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 5–7, 2017
Chicago, Illinois**

**The Archives and Archivists Listserv
(Prepared by SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont and
Web and IT Services Administrator Matt Black)**

BACKGROUND

The Archives and Archivists (A&A) Discussion List¹ was established in 1989 by Donna and John Harlan as an open forum for all topics relating to archival theory and practice. In late 1993, the list was migrated to Miami University. In 1998 SAA assumed sponsorship of the list as a service to the archives profession. It remained hosted at Miami University under the stewardship of Robert Schmidt until September 2006, at which time SAA assumed full ownership of the list and responsibility for its ongoing maintenance.

The list [Terms of Participation](#) were revised and approved by the SAA Council in August 2006 and further revised in August 2009, May 2013, August 2014, and August 2015.

In June 2014, in response to dissatisfaction expressed by several SAA members and other participants regarding conduct on the A&A list, the SAA Council appointed a short-term working group that conducted a user survey in July 2014 and proposed revisions ~~in~~ to the Terms of Participation based on the survey results.² Following discussion at its August 2014 meeting, the Council determined that 1) SAA would continue to host the listserv; 2) SAA would retain the A&A Listserv as a general archives forum not restricted to SAA members; 3) list behavior would be guided by the SAA Code of Conduct and the strengthened Terms of Participation approved by the Council at that meeting; and 4) the outcome of these changes would be evaluated by the Council at its May 2015 meeting to determine the continuing value of the list to SAA.³

Per the May 2015 meeting minutes: “Council members reiterated their desire for SAA to continue hosting the discussion list, agreed with ideas proposed for improving the technology infrastructure supporting the list, and asked A&A List liaisons Huth and Mangiafico to field the draft Terms of Participation for member and list subscriber feedback, with a goal of voting on the revised Terms at the August 2015 Council meeting.”⁴ Revised Terms were approved in August 2015.

¹ <https://www2.archivists.org/listservs/archives>.

² See August 2014 report: <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0814-1-IV-D-A&AList.pdf>.

³ See August 2014 meeting minutes: https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0814-1-minutes_adopted.pdf.

⁴ See May 2015 meeting minutes: https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0515%20Minutes_For%20Posting.pdf.

In 2017, several violations of the list Terms (and the [SAA Code of Conduct](#)) resulted in reminders to participants and, in one case, suspension from participation in the list. Most recently, in response to violations in the list Terms, the Council issued the following statement (excerpt):

The SAA Council also is concerned about a recent discussion on the Archives & Archivists Listserv in reaction to the Campus Reform post. SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont shut down the discussion thread on August 9 because several of the posters used unprofessional or intimidating language and the discussion was becoming redundant and circular. The purpose of the list is to foster discussion of archives and archives issues, including all aspects of the theory and practice of the archives profession. The Terms of Participation clearly prohibit personal attacks and inflammatory remarks of a personal nature. The SAA Council will be reviewing the role and future of the A&A List at its November 2017 meeting. In the meantime, posts will be moderated actively. If you have ideas about 1) how the List might be improved or 2) any new communication tools that we might consider as an enhancement to or substitute for the A&A List, please send your ideas to president@archivists.org.

As of October 21, no comments had been received (via any medium) in response to this message. The list has been in active moderation since the August 9 incident.

See the following table for subscription information.

A&A List Subscribers - October 20, 2017			
	Mail	Digest	Total
Nonmember	1496	2796	4292
Member	754	1265	2019
Total	2250	4061	6311

DISCUSSION

Benefits of the A&A List

The most important benefit of the A&A list has been its connection with a significant number of nonmembers – a good proportion of whom are likely to be prospective members. We have been reluctant to let go of access to those who are interested enough in the profession – and possibly SAA’s services and products – to remain subscribers.

The list has often provided a forum for practical advice and informal questions and answers on technical and policy questions. When it has done this well, it has served SAA’s mission to be “the preeminent source of professional resources and the principal communication hub for American archivists.”

Challenges Presented by the A&A List

Despite many revisions, the Terms of Participation have not provided adequate clarity or means of enforcement to arrest inappropriate behavior. It seems that, at times, certain list participants (including nonmembers) have used the list to “tweak” SAA and taunt other individuals. We encourage them to seek out a new hobby.

The reputation of the list has been declining for years, and this reflects poorly on SAA and its brand. One striking example is the emergence of the Twitter hashtag “#thatdarnlist” to mark conversations about the list. Many SAA members have publicly encouraged archivists to avoid the list entirely. And many members who are great assets in building the types of community to which we aspire have been clear that they are not interested in rehabilitating the current list.

The A&A list requires a disproportionate amount of staff time compared to other lists. And yet the current level of monitoring and moderation have proven to be insufficient in preventing inappropriate behavior or providing timely enforcement of the Terms of Participation.

CONCLUSION

The Archives and Archivists Listserv was created at a time when there were few options for connecting thousands of archivists. Today there are many options for communicating broadly—including Facebook, Twitter, websites, individual and group blogs, and SAA section discussion lists, which are open to both SAA members and nonmember participants. (In fact, in the 2014 survey, SAA section discussion lists were specifically cited as models for the A&A list to emulate.⁵)

At its best, the A&A List has been an example of SAA’s ideals for community and collaboration among archivists to serve the profession. At its worst, however, the list has undermined our values of inclusion, diversity, and community among archivists. We believe we can do better and that the time has come to invest SAA’s resources in new models.

Our selection of and transition to a new association management system is our highest priority in the coming months. Coincident with that selection and transition process will be implementation of a new “online communities” platform through [Higher Logic](#). We recommend that the A&A List be decommissioned, effective December 31, 2017; that the list archives (2006-2017) be maintained by SAA so that those who want access will have it; and that we pause as the staff explores other options for online forums and reviews those with the Council. Given the priority of the association management system, this pause may be for up to a year.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Archives and Archivists (A&A) List be decommissioned, effective December 31, 2017;

⁵ See August 2014 report: <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0814-1-IV-D-A&AList.pdf>.

THAT the A&A List archives (2006-2017) be maintained by SAA to ensure access by all; and

THAT the SAA staff explore options for providing an online forum for profession-wide discussion that can be monitored effectively and moderated to ensure that it fosters a professional exchange of ideas.

Support Statement: At its best, the A&A List has been an example of SAA's ideals for community and collaboration among archivists to serve the profession. However, at its worst, the list has undermined our values of inclusion, diversity, and community among archivists. We believe we can do better and that the time has come to invest SAA's resources in new models.

Relation to Strategic Priorities: An appropriate communication tool that links SAA members and others with an interest in the profession potentially would serve all of SAA's strategic priorities.

Fiscal Impact: Some savings after December 31 of small honorarium paid to list moderator. Some savings in staff time spent in resolving ongoing violation of list terms of participation. Exploration of Higher Logic capabilities and options for implementation is likely to take a significant amount of staff time in conjunction with the AMS implementation.